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# AMERICAN HISTORY ILLUSTRATED

VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 7 NOVEMBER 1987



## Features

- 12** **Not a Look of Fear was Seen** by Jeff Seiken  
*A bold captain, a spirited crew, and a wooden ship with "sides of iron" earned new respect for America when the USS Constitution met the HMS Guerrière in 1812.*
- 24** **Old Ironsides** by Harold Holzer  
*The USS Constitution never lost a battle, but age and neglect nearly sank her. Thanks to a concerned public, she survives as America's most honored naval relic.*
- 32** **The Phantom Amendment & the Duchess of Baltimore** by W. H. Earle  
*Betsy Patterson Bonaparte was spurned by Napoleon despite marriage to his brother. Her obsession with nobility prompted a move to strip citizenship from titled Americans.*
- 40** **George Gipp** by Joseph Gustaitis  
*Notre Dame's first All-American left a football legacy and a legendary last request when he died at age twenty-five.*
- 42** **A Mechanic Gave the World a Lift** by Sharon Cramer Drain  
*With a wagon spring, ratchets, and imagination, inventor Elisha Otis made safe the once-hazardous elevator and allowed buildings to soar to new heights.*

## Departments

- 4 History Today**
- 6 Mailbox**
- 8 Sight & Sound**
- 10 Bookshelf**



## Cover

Undeclared in forty actions, the USS *Constitution* (here portrayed in a classic 1926 oil by Gordon Grant) earned new respect for American naval power during the early nineteenth century. Restored to her 1812 appearance, she remains in commission today as the U.S. Navy's oldest commissioned warship.

*American History Illustrated* (ISSN 0002-8770), is published monthly except July and August by Historical Times, Inc., 2245 Kohn Road, P.O. Box 8200, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8200. Subscriptions: \$18.00 a year. In Canada and all other countries, \$23.00. Second Class postage paid at Harrisburg, PA 17105 and at additional mailing offices. Printed by World Color Press, Effingham, IL. Other Historical Times Inc., publications include *British Heritage*, *Civil War Times Illustrated*, *Country Journal*, *Early American Life*, *Fly Fisherman*, *The Original New England Guide* and *Museum Editions Limited*. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce the issue or portions thereof must be secured in writing from the editor. Address inquiries to *American History Illustrated*, Box 8200, Harrisburg, PA (717-657-9555). This magazine accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts not accompanied by return postage. Copyright 1987. Historical Times, Inc. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *American History Illustrated*, P.O. Box 1776, Mt. Morris, IL 61054.

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## Northwest Territory Expedition Rolling Again

In 1787-88 two companies of forty-eight men that included Revolutionary War soldiers and some civilian workmen left Ispwich (now Hamilton), Massachusetts, on an 850-mile trek to establish permanent settlements in the new Northwest Territory established by the Ordinance of 1787. (The Ordinance, which preceded the Constitution and included unprecedented humanitarian principles, opened to settlement lands west of the Ohio River and prohibited slavery there.) General Rufus Putnam, the group's leader, kept a diary of the arduous trip, and 150 years later, in 1937-38 a group of thirty-eight men retraced the route using that diary as a guide. Equipped with a wagon rebuilt on the steel framework of a Revolutionary era wagon pulled by two oxen, the adventurers, who were chosen from all over the nation, wore period clothing and presented to record crowds historical pageants depicting the settlement of the Northwest Territory. The men, who often met hardships

equal to those of their predecessors, were frequently greeted as heroes in the communities they passed through during their four-month journey that recalled the courage and tenacity of the early pioneers who settled these western lands. During July and August 1987, another group that included some of the twenty known survivors of the 1937 re-enactment followed the same route in an ox-drawn wagon. The essential purpose of the re-enactment, according to its leader, Edwin Pugh, history professor at Palm Beach [Florida] Junior College, was to recall during the Constitution Bicentennial the humble heroism and constructive determinations of the plain American citizens who first decided the type of government under which they would live and then carried that government westward across a continent to develop this great nation. ★

*Compiled from information provided by Ginger Kuh.*





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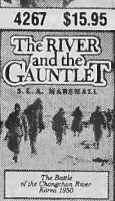
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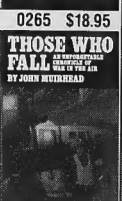
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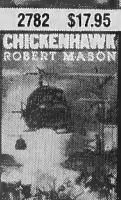
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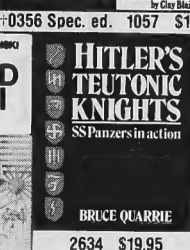
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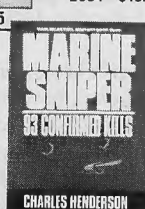
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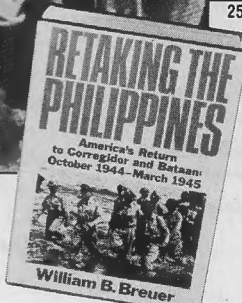
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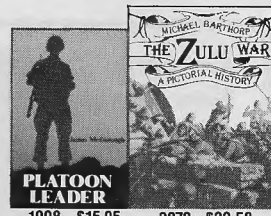
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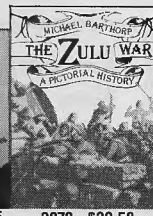
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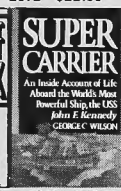
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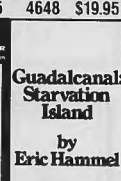
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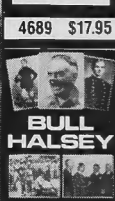
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## Mailbox

### Learned Something New

Just a line to say that your October issue is one of the best yet. I had known nothing of Lafayette's imprisonment.

And I guess even worse—I did not even know there *was* a real Eliot Ness! The only bad thing—I have always admired Senator Lausche. No longer! And I had always thought Al Capone died in prison.

Elizabeth Zutt  
Evansville, Indiana

### How Many Federalist Papers?

I wish to express my constant enjoyment with reading your magazine. The Summer 1987 issue, dedicated to the Constitution, is especially well done.

In this issue, however, one point of confusion does arise in the section entitled "Becoming A Nation." Regarding the Federalist Papers, page 46 states: "There were eighty-five letters from 'Publius'—fifty-five written by Hamilton, twenty-nine by Madison, and five by Jay." By my addition 55, 29, and 5 add up to 89, not 85. Where do the extra 4 letters figure in?

Doug J. Schreiber  
Kansas City, Missouri

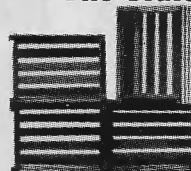
*Author Brian McGinty responds:*

*Which of the authors wrote which of the letters was, for over a century and a half, a source of controversy amongst scholars—in part because all of Hamilton's and Madison's manuscripts were destroyed after the letters were printed, in part because both men claimed authorship to several of the letters. Recent scholarship (including computer-assisted textual analysis) has established that, of the total of eighty-five letters, Hamilton wrote fifty-one, Madison twenty-nine, and Jay five. We regret having reported that Hamilton wrote fifty-five.*

### Ness Died at Fifty-Four

In "The Real Eliot Ness" [October 1987 issue] by Steven Nickel, Eliot Ness is stated to have died at age

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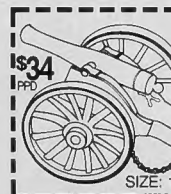
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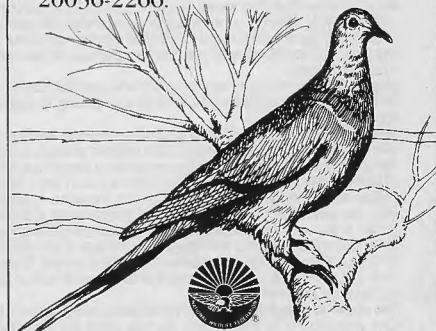
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forty-four. If he was born, as stated, in April 1903 and died, as later stated, in May 1957, Eliot Ness would have been fifty-four at the time of his death.

H.G. Grainger, D.O.  
Tyler, Texas

Several alert readers caught this typographical error: Eliot Ness was fifty-four, not forty-four, when he died in May 1957.

The Editors

## Thanks for Special Issue

I have just finished reading the Summer 1987 issue of *American History Illustrated* dealing with the U.S. Constitution. I'd like to compliment you on, in my opinion, an extremely informative and well-written account. As a U.S. history teacher, I found it to be not only informative but extremely interesting. . . .

. . . I feel that this [issue] would provide excellent background reading for teachers who will be teaching the Constitution this year. . . .

This is the first year I have subscribed to *American History Illustrated*, and I've enjoyed it thoroughly. It often provides a unique perspective on issues often ignored by the history books.

Mary Richards  
Seattle, Washington

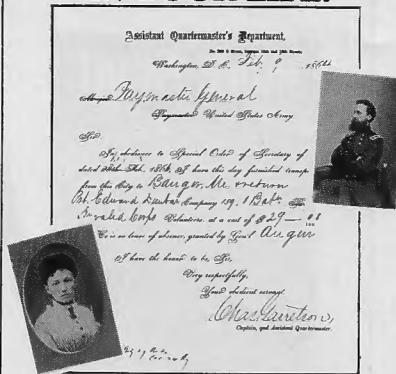
## "Bearly Correct"

An otherwise fascinating piece on Amelia Earhart's last flight [May 1987 issue] struck a jarring note when I read on page 16, third line, last paragraph, that "Earhart's transmission was bearily audible." I take it that it is meant that the transmission was almost inaudible? Can't find "bearly" in my dictionary.

Owen J. Remington  
Lancaster, Virginia

*American History Illustrated welcomes comments from our readers. While we endeavor to publish a representative sampling of this correspondence, we regret that limited space prevents us from printing every letter. Address correspondence to The Mailbox, American History Illustrated, Box 8200, Harrisburg, PA 17105. ★*

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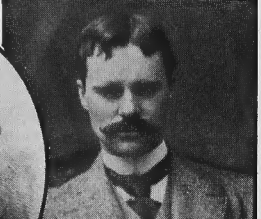
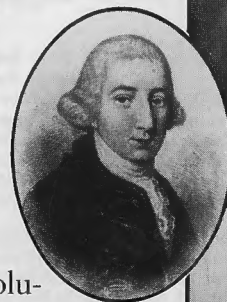
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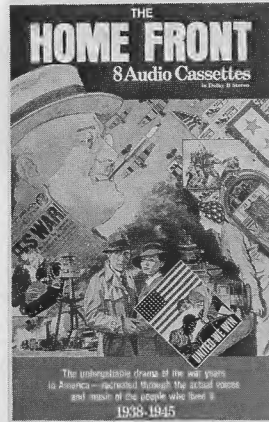
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with today's great magicians, the  
video takes viewers on a wondrous  
trip through Houdini's collection  
of locks, trunks with special trap  
doors, and other memorabilia. Al-  
though the secrets to many of  
Houdini's illusions were really  
quite simple, "the man whom no  
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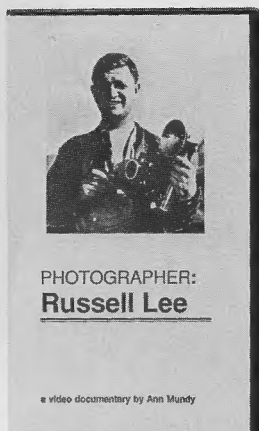
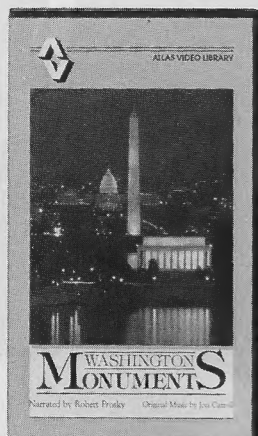
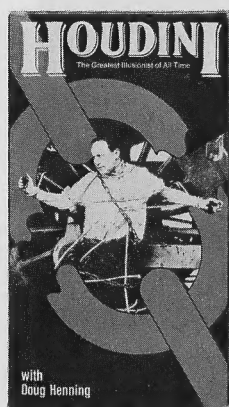
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**Washington Monuments** (*Atlas Video, Inc., 1418 Montague Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20011, 202-722-4486; VHS or Beta, 30 minutes, \$19.95*).

This video tour of attractions in Washington, D.C., effectively captures the historical significance of sixteen major sites as well as the beauty of the city. Washington-based actor Robert Prosky (of "Hill Street Blues") narrates to the accompaniment of an original music score by Grammy-winning Washingtonian Jon Carroll. Sites included are: the Supreme Court, Library of Congress, U.S. Capitol, National Gallery of Art, National Air and Space Museum, Hirshhorn Museum, National Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, The White House, Jefferson Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, and the John F. Kennedy Center. The beautifully photographed thirty-minute tour is solid family entertainment.

**Photographer: Russell Lee** (*Ann Mundy & Associates, P.O. Box 5354, Austin, Texas 78763, 512-327-5100; VHS or Beta, 58 minutes, \$250.00*).

Best known for his work for the Farm Security Administration during the Depression, Russell Lee was also a pioneer in the fields of color and flash photography during his forty-year career. This program, which features more than four hundred of Lee's still photographs, plus archival film, music, and in-

terviews with Lee and some of his best-known contemporaries, provides viewers with a political, economic, and social history of America between the 1920s and 1960s. Ann Mundy, producer and director of the award-winning documentary, is a former student of Lee.

**We The People** (*Films for the Humanities, P.O. Box 2053, Princeton NJ 08543, 1-800-257-5127, 609-452-1128 in New Jersey; VHS or Beta, four 60-minute tapes, \$179.00 per tape or \$649.00 for the set; rentals also available*). Introduced by President Ronald Reagan and hosted by Peter Jennings, the series, which aired on PBS stations this fall, examines current events, recent American history, and contemporary constitutional issues. The four parts are: "Free to Believe," focusing on the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression and religion; "What Price Equality?" featuring a federal court ruling against school and housing discrimination, and San Francisco women who sued to join the city's all-male fire department; "Law and Order," shot primarily in Oakland, California, and devoted to the question of whether the constitutional rights of the accused impede or strengthen the police force; and "Who's In Charge?" exploring separation of state and federal government and of the three federal branches. (The program is also available as eight 30-minute videocassettes with study guides for classroom and library convenience.) ★

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## History Bookshelf



**First Ladies** by Betty Boyd Caroli (*Oxford University Press, New York, 1987; 398 pages, illustrated, \$19.95*).

When George Washington first took office in 1789, the public was unsure how to treat America's premiere first lady. Martha, and the first ladies who followed her, soon set the standard of how later women would treat the title. But specific roles for the first ladies changed according to current social standards, says Caroli, whose volume traces the evolution of that unique group of thirty-six women from ceremonial backdrop to substantive world figure. The presidents' wives were remarkably diverse—in age (from the twenties to the sixties), in education, and in public ambition. A surprising number were socially and economically superior to their husbands, Caroli contends. *First Ladies* provides an insightful collective portrait of the women who have filled "the most demanding, unpaid, unelected job in America."

**An American Vision: Three Generations of Wyeth Art** with essays by James H. Duff, Andrew Wyeth, Thomas Hoving, and Lincoln Kirstein (*New York Graphic Society and Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1987; 210 pages, illustrated, \$40.00*).

Published in conjunction with an exhibit recently shown in Russia and currently touring the United States, this lavishly illustrated volume focuses on the lives and art of painters N. C. Wyeth, his son Andrew Wyeth, and grandson James Wyeth. Of particular interest from a historical point of view are an in-

troductory essay by Brandywine River Museum director James Duff, a warm reminiscence of N. C. Wyeth by Andrew Wyeth, and more than three dozen superb color reproductions of the eldest Wyeth's now-classic book illustrations.

**Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War** by Gerald F. Linderman (*The Free Press, New York City, 1987; 288 pages, illustrated, \$22.50*).

Using Civil War soldiers' own words, Gerald Linderman's study of men at war provides penetrating insights into the romantic myth of battle and the nature of soldiering. These warriors went into battle believing their courage and moral fiber would win the war, but suffered a disillusionment more profound than historians have acknowledged, says Linderman. Even the soldiers themselves, within a generation, had transformed their combat experiences into a nostalgic and heroic vision of war quite different from the battles they fought. It was this romanticized version that they passed on to their children, despite their having earlier discovered that "war is a horrifying thing."

**Eyewitness: The Amelia Earhart Incident** by Thomas E. Devine with Richard M. Daley (*Renaissance House, Frederick, Colorado, 1987; 225 pages, illustrated, \$24.95*).

In the summer of 1944 co-author Devine was an army sergeant on just-captured Saipan in the Mariana Islands. Devine claims that during a visit to the island's newly

occupied airfield, he saw a twin-engined civilian aircraft bearing identification numbers identical to those of the plane flown by aviatrix Amelia Earhart when she disappeared in the South Pacific in 1937. Later he saw the plane destroyed by order of a man he subsequently identified as Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. This book documents Devine's decades of research into the Earhart mystery and his struggle to convince authorities and the public that Earhart was a Japanese prisoner on Saipan and died there.

**Bluejacket: An Autobiography** by Fred J. Buenzle with A. Grove Day (*Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1986; 347 pages, illustrated, \$19.95*).

In 1889 sixteen-year-old Fred Buenzle enlisted as an apprentice at the League Island Navy Yard in Philadelphia. During the decade that followed he served in some of the U.S. Navy's last sailing ships; aboard the U.S.S. *Dolphin*, the first steel ship of the "new" navy; and during the Spanish-American war as personal clerk to Rear Admiral William Sampson at the Battle of Santiago. Buenzle's sensitively written account of life at sea during a significant period of transition compares favorably with *White Jacket*, Herman Melville's narrative of his naval service a half-century earlier. A reprint of a book first published in 1939, this volume is part of the Naval Institute "Classics of Naval Literature" series, which also includes such titles as Richard McKenna's *The Sand Pebbles* and Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World*. ★



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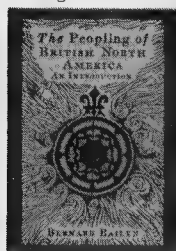
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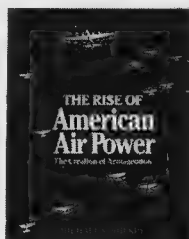
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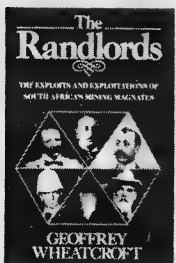
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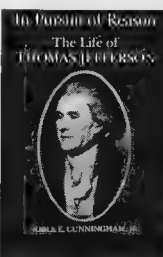
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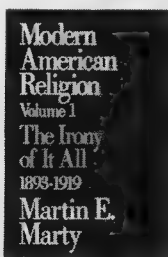
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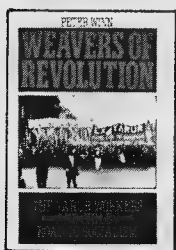
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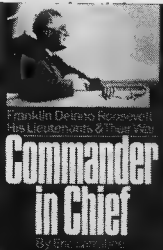
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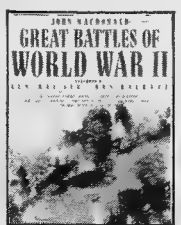
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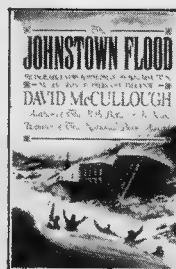
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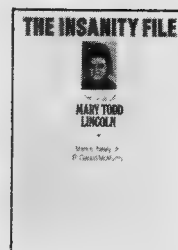
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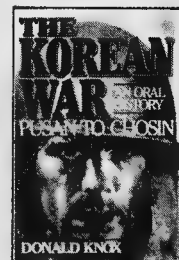
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A bold captain, a spirited crew, and a wooden ship with “sides of iron” earned new respect for America on the high seas when the USS Constitution met the HMS Guerrière in 1812.

# “Not a Look of Fear was Seen”

by Jeff Seiken

**N**EW, RUMORS, AND SPECULATION about the six-week-old war with England swept through Boston as July turned to August during the summer of 1812. One report cautioned that an English frigate was preying on American fishermen off Cape Cod. Another warned that a British warship had been sighted to the east of Cape Ann. From Newport came notice of the arrival of a brig bearing 155 paroled sailors, mates, and captains from American ships seized by the Royal Navy.

To Isaac Hull, captain of the United States frigate *Constitution*, one thing seemed certain—if he did not get to sea quickly, it would be only a matter of time before British men-of-war appeared off Boston and prevented him from leaving port at all.

The *Constitution* had been anchored in the harbor since the evening of July 26. Recently overhauled at the Washington Navy Yard, she had sailed from Annapolis on July 5, bound for New York, where Hull expected to join a five-ship squadron of warships commanded by John Rodgers. Off the coast of New Jersey, however, the *Constitution* had fallen in with less friendly company—four English frigates and a sixty-four-gun ship-of-the-line. The *Constitution* had escaped from the powerful British squadron after a harrowing sixty-six-hour chase [see pages 16-17], but the enemy's proximity had then forced Hull away from New York to the northern haven of Boston.

Hull wanted to remain in port only long enough to restock his warship's depleted stores and plan his next move. Immediately after arriving in Boston he sent letters to New York, but he gained no useful intelligence from that quarter. Commodore Rodgers had sailed during the third week of June and had ne-



glected to leave Hull any instructions or clues as to his intentions.\* Hull also dispatched a report to Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton in Washington, D.C., but as of August 1 no new orders had been received from him.

**W**HILE THE officers and crew of the *Constitution* busied themselves at loading provisions and training at the ship's guns, the rest of the nation bitterly argued the wisdom and necessity of the current war. In the eyes of President James Madison and the "War Hawks" in Congress, attacks against American merchant vessels by English cruisers enforcing the blockade of Napoleon's European Empire, coupled with the ongoing impressment of American seamen by the Royal Navy, had left no choice but that of taking up arms.

Ironically, the sharpest condemnations of Madison's policies had come from New England, the center of the nation's maritime economy. New Englanders saw the war as a death sentence for their seaborne livelihood. Better to endure the restrictions imposed on maritime trade by the British blockade than to suffer its certain destruction in a test of naval strength with England.

A straight comparison of numbers revealed good cause for pessimism. The United States Navy seemed hopelessly outmatched, like a David seeking battle with not one, but a dozen, Goliaths. The Royal Navy in 1812 totaled some six hundred vessels in commission, including 102 ships-of-the-line and 124 frigates.\*\* In contrast, the United States could muster only eight seaworthy frigates and a handful of smaller warships.

Fewer than half of the American frigates were ready for immediate service at the war's start. Indeed, the outbreak of hostilities in June had found the *Constitution* without a complete crew and lacking such vital stores as powder charges for her guns. Although the ongoing struggle against Napoleon demanded the attention of the majority of the British fleet, three ships-of-the-line and fifteen frigates of thirty-two guns or more each were operating from a string of bases in the Western Atlantic and Caribbean.

The great disparity in numbers was not the only reason for despair. Throughout twenty years of constant warfare, the Royal Navy had proven well-nigh invincible: in two hundred single-ship engagements the English flag had been hauled down in defeat a mere five times. As the fledgling United States Navy prepared for battle at the start of the war, the tradition of victory weighed heavily on the English side.

But as he made ready to set sail from Boston, Captain Isaac Hull was not at all cowed by the aura of British

*Captain Isaac Hull of the USS Constitution (here shown in an 1807 portrait by Gilbert Stuart) demonstrated his superb abilities as a seaman in July 1812 when he evaded a pursuing squadron of British warships off New Jersey; his boldness as a tactician came into play a month later with his decisive victory over the HMS Guerrière.*

naval supremacy. A portly man with a cherubic face and curly hair, the thirty-nine-year-old naval officer was a superb seaman and no stranger to war. In 1798, as a youthful veteran of merchant sail, Hull had entered the newly-organized American navy as a lieutenant, sailing aboard the *Constitution* on her maiden voyage during the Quasi War with France (1798-1800). Commanding the schooner *Enterprise* during the war against the Barbary Pirates (1801-1805), he had boldly intercepted and helped to destroy a Tripolitan warship three times the size of his own command. In 1806, after four years of commendable service in the Mediterranean, he had been promoted to captain.

By August 1812 Hull had been commander of the *Constitution* for just over two years. In a letter describing the frigate's readiness for battle in early July, he had offered this assessment: "In a few days, we shall have nothing to fear from any single deck Ship; indeed . . . we should I hope give a good account of any Frigate the enemy [has]."

His words were no idle boast. Launched in Boston in 1797, the *Constitution* combined the sailing qualities of a frigate with the strength and firepower of a small ship-of-the-line. Her unusually heavy, closely-spaced frames were constructed of live oak, considered to be the most durable wood in the world. Although rated for forty-four guns, in August 1812 the ship carried fifty-five: a gun-deck armament of thirty 24-pounder long guns, and, on the spar deck above, twenty-four 32-pounder carronades, plus a single 18-pounder long gun. According to the ship's muster roll, her crew numbered 473—a complement far in excess of that carried by most British frigates. The *Constitution* lacked nothing except a true test of her capabilities; despite service in the Quasi and Barbary wars, she had never met another frigate in a single-ship duel.

**E**ARLY ON THE MORNING of August 2, Hull took advantage of a favorable southwest breeze to get underway. At 6:45 A.M., the *Constitution* passed the Boston Lighthouse and stood clear of the harbor, then paused to await the return of one of the ship's boats that had been sent to make a last-minute call at the post office.

The fog and rain of the previous few days was clearing—certainly a promising omen—but the prospect of sailing without any communication from Secretary of the Navy Hamilton left Hull uneasy. In a last-minute dispatch to Hamilton, the *Constitution's* captain had *Article continues overleaf; text continues on page 18*

\*Without waiting for orders, Rodgers had set out immediately after receiving word of the declaration of war, with the intention of intercepting a convoy of British merchantmen presumed en route from the West Indies to England.

\*\*Ship-of-the-line: a large, heavily armed ship capable of taking its place in the "line of battle" and dealing out and absorbing the heaviest blows. Frigate: "a fast naval vessel having a lofty ship rig and heavily armed on one or two decks."







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*A month before her famous battle with the Guerrière, the Constitution encountered an entire squadron of British warships (including the Guerrière) off the U.S. East Coast. The nearly three days of intense maneuvers that followed—called by one historian “the most wonderful chase recorded in nautical history”—are briefly described in the following narrative by nineteenth-century writer Edgar Stanton Maclay.\**

UNTIL THE SEVENTEENTH of July the *Constitution* had been progressing on an uneventful voyage, when at two o'clock in the afternoon four sails were seen directly ahead about twelve miles off Barnegat [Egg Harbor, New Jersey]. At this moment the ship was under easy canvas, and the weather was clear, with a fresh breeze from the northeast. At three o'clock, finding that he was getting too near the coast, Captain Hull went about on the opposite tack, steering due east. The vessels in sight were Captain Philip Bowes Vere Broke's blockading squadron, which consisted of the 38-gun frigate *Shannon*, the 64-gun razee *Africa*, the 36-gun frigate *Belvidera*, and the 32-gun frigate *Aeolus*.

At 4 P.M. Captain Hull descried another sail to the north. This ship later proved to be the 38-gun frigate *Guerrière*, under Captain James Richard Dacres.

Daylight on the eighteenth showed that the strangers were British ships, and Captain Hull immediately put about to the south to escape. At 5 A.M., the wind, which had been light, failed entirely, and at 5:15 A.M. Captain Hull hoisted out the first cutter and got his other boats to tow. In the meantime a 24-pounder was hoisted from the main deck to the quarterdeck, to be used as a stern chaser, and an 18-pounder from the forecastle was brought aft, a portion of the taffrail being cut away to make room for it. Then two more guns were run out of the cabin windows aft, giving the *Constitution* in all four stern chasers. The American frigate then set her topgallant studding sails and staysails.

At 5:45 A.M. Captain Byron of the *Belvidera*, detecting the means by which the *Constitution* was slowly drawing away, sent his boats ahead to tow, and this expedient was then resorted to by nearly all the commanders. Every effort that ingenuity or experience could suggest was made to increase the *Constitution's* headway, and even the hammocks were removed from the nettings and the cloths rolled up to prevent their unfavorable action.

*\*Abridged from a chapter in Maclay's A History of the United States Navy (1893).*



“But in spite of all these exertions,” wrote Lieutenant Richard Morris of the *Constitution*, “our chance for escape was considered hopeless. For many months the *Constitution* had proved a very dull sailor, and it was supposed that the first steady breeze would bring up such a force as would render resistance of no avail. At about eight o'clock one of the British frigates called all the boats of the squadron to her, and having arranged them for towing, furled all sail. This brought her toward us steadily and seemed to decide our fate. Fortunately for us, however, a slight breeze sent us forward a few hundred yards before the English frigate could set her sails to profit by it.”

The light puff of air soon died away, and again the British frigate was slowly but surely drawing up to her



prey. The enemy now opened fire, and some of his shot passed over the *Constitution*.

At this critical juncture, the lead showing a depth of twenty-six fathoms [156 feet], Lieutenant Morris suggested the feasibility of kedging.\* As the situation of the frigate was growing desperate, Captain Hull resolved to attempt kedging, and accordingly the hawsers and rigging in the ship, from a five-inch rope upward, were spliced into a line nearly a mile long, one end of which was bent to a kedge or small anchor and carried ahead of the frigate in a boat to the full extent of the line and dropped into the water. The men then seized the inboard end, and hauling slowly and carefully at first, until the ship was in motion, gradually increased the tension, and ran aft with it, thus warping the ship ahead. In the meantime another kedge was prepared, so that by the time the first kedge was tripped the second was ready to be hauled on.

The *Constitution* now fired a gun and hoisted her colors by way of waving an adieu. It was some time before the puzzled Englishmen could understand how the American frigate, out of sight of land in a calm, could thus glide from their grasp. But it was only for a short time that Captain Hull enjoyed the enemy's perplexity, for Captain Byron discovered the secret and promptly followed his example.

At 9:09 A.M. a light breeze sprang up from the south, and Captain Hull braced by the wind on the port tack, and without losing an inch of headway, ran his boats up to their davits or suspended them from spars by temporary tackles with their crews still in them, ready to resume towing again at a moment's notice. The breeze came at a most opportune time, for the enemy, having put all his boats on the leading ship, was gradually bringing her into cannon range.

At 10 A.M. it again fell calm, when Captain Hull promptly sent his boats out to resume towing and kedging. The enemy then got all his boats on the *Belvidera*'s tow line, which enabled her to gain so much that Captain Hull was compelled to lighten his ship by pumping out twenty-three hundred and thirty-five gallons of fresh water.

The wind continued light and baffling throughout the morning and afternoon, and at 1:53 P.M. the *Belvidera* was nearly within range and opened fire, which the *Constitution* returned with her stern chasers, but as the shot fell short the frigates soon desisted. Thus with towing and kedging the afternoon of the eighteenth was passed. At 7 P.M. Captain Hull lowered three boats and sent them ahead to tow, but at 10:53 P.M. a fresh breeze sprang up from the south, and the boats were run up to their places, and the fore topmast staysail and main topgallant studding sail were set. This gave the exhausted crews much-needed rest. No one, however, thought of "turning in," but the men caught snatches of sleep whenever it was possible.

\*Pulling the ship ahead by her anchors.

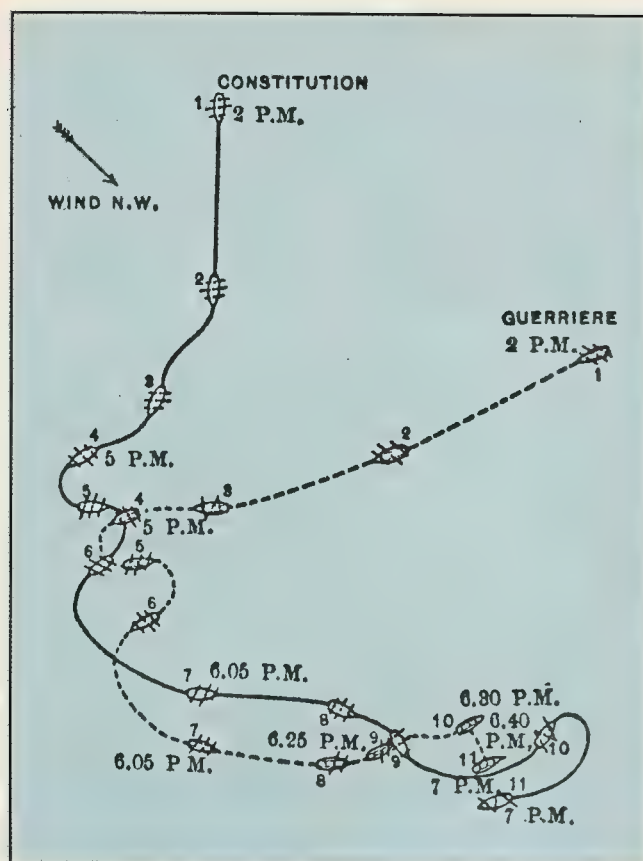
At midnight it again fell calm, but the commanders of all the ships allowed their men to rest until 2 A.M., July nineteenth, when towing and kedging were resumed. These continued until daylight, at which time the *Belvidera*, having gained a position off the lee beam of the *Constitution*, stood about to close. In order to avoid her, Captain Hull tacked likewise, but in so doing he was compelled to pass within gunshot of the *Aeolus* on the contrary tack. Much to the surprise of all, Captain Townshend did not offer to exchange broadsides, and allowed the *Constitution* to pass unmolested.

By noon the wind had become light again, and it continued so throughout the afternoon. All this time the *Constitution* kept about four miles ahead of the enemy's leading ship, the *Belvidera*. At 6:30 P.M. a squall of wind and rain was seen approaching, and Captain Hull, still being to windward, determined on a stratagem by which he hoped to increase his lead. Everything was kept fast until just before the squall struck the ship, when, in an incredibly short time, all the light sails were furled, a double reef was put in the mizzen topsail, and every precaution taken to make snug for a heavy blow. Observing these extreme preparations, the English commanders supposed, as Captain Hull intended, that a squall of unusual violence was coming down, so, without waiting for it to reach them, they began shortening sail and bore up before the wind, which headed them in a direction opposite to that which the *Constitution* was taking.

The squall, as Captain Hull could see, was light, and as soon as the rain shut in his frigate from the enemy's view he made sail and soon had his ship bowling along with a stiff breeze at eleven knots, instead of having her on her beam ends as his pursuers supposed. In forty-five minutes the squall had blown over, when the British squadron was seen so far to leeward as to relieve the Americans of immediate fear of capture. The enemy, with commendable tenacity, persevered in the chase throughout the following night and until half-past eight on the morning of the twentieth, when they gave it up and stood about to the northeast.

This celebrated chase extended over three nights and two days—or sixty-six hours and thirty minutes—during which time Captain Hull displayed an indomitable perseverance and skillful seamanship, which have justly ranked him among the greatest of our naval commanders. Nor must the officers and men who so gallantly supported their leader during all these trying hours be forgotten. It will be remembered that when the *Constitution* sailed from the Chesapeake, five days before, her crew had assembled on her deck for the first time; many of them were then for the first time, in a vessel of war, and had not as yet been thoroughly instructed in the duties or accustomed to the exacting discipline of a man-of-war. In spite of this, such coolness and order were maintained during the chase that not a single boat was abandoned. ★





Although not correct in all details, this diagram from an old account of the Constitution-Guerrière battle shows the general relationships between the two frigates during their running duel.

carefully outlined his cruising plans, adding an assurance in the final paragraph that “should I not get letters from you and should proceed as above, I pray you to be assured that I have done so with a view of being useful to my country, and of taking a direction that I supposed you would give me, had I your orders.”

On that note, Hull set a course to the northeast, unaware that a letter from Hamilton was in fact en route to Boston, ordering the *Constitution* to remain in port until further notice.

The first week at sea passed uneventfully. The *Constitution* cruised off Halifax and Cape Sable without success and then tried a new cruising ground off the Gulf of St. Lawrence, astride the path of ships bound to or from Halifax or Quebec. Hull used these relatively quiet days to continue the training of his crew, many of whom had been “green” recruits when signed aboard the frigate in June.

On August 10 and 11, the *Constitution* captured two merchant brigs. Hull ordered the crews removed and the prizes burned. An early morning chase on August 15 resulted in the “recapture” of the *Adeline*, an American brig that had been seized by an English sloop and put under the command of a prize crew. From the English

sailors brought aboard the *Constitution* as prisoners, Hull learned that a squadron of frigates—the same warships that had chased him the previous month—lurked nearby. Not eager to risk another meeting with this more powerful force, Hull prudently charted a course toward the south that would place him in the track of vessels headed to Europe from the West Indies.

An encounter with the American privateer *Decatur* on the night of August 17 provided Hull with more valuable information. The captain of the *Decatur*, William Nichols, told Hull that “he saw the day before a Ship of War standing to the Southward, and that she could not be far from us.” Hull decided to sail in chase immediately.

**B**Y NOON of August 19 the *Constitution* was about eight hundred miles east of Boston, heading in a southwesterly course. She was sailing on rough seas, under cloudy skies, driven by fresh northerly breezes. At 2 P.M., a cry from the masthead lookout shattered the routine of the afternoon watch. A large sail stood to the southeast! Hull immediately ordered additional sail set, and the *Constitution* turned toward the stranger on the horizon. Within an hour the sail had grown into a ship, cruising close-hauled on the starboard tack. Thirty minutes later it was apparent that the ship was a frigate.

At 3:45 P.M., the unidentified frigate, now about three miles distant, backed her maintopsail to slow her progress. With the *Constitution* upwind of her quarry and the other ship making no attempt to flee, Hull saw no need for a headlong rush into battle. Briefly heaving to, he ordered the light sails trimmed, the royal yards brought down, another reef taken in the topsails, and the fore and main sails hauled up. Then he ordered the ship cleared for action. Work parties quickly rigged chains over the upper deck for protection against falling spars and rigging, the surgeon and his assistants retired to their stations below the waterline, and other crewmen scurried to their posts in the magazines, alongside the guns, or aloft in the fighting tops.

For a crew comprised of many sailors with less than two months’ experience aboard a warship, these were tense moments. Nevertheless, “From the Smallest boy in the Ship to the oldest Seaman,” as Hull would later write, “not a look of fear was seen. They all went into action, giving three cheers and requesting to be laid alongside the enemy.”

As the *Constitution* again turned downwind and steered for the other ship, the as-yet-unidentified frigate hoisted three English ensigns. Later Hull would learn that she was the HMS *Guerrière*, one of the frigates that had pursued the *Constitution* the previous month. Now the *Guerrière* was en route to Halifax for provisions and a much-needed refitting. But this had not prevented her

*Recommended additional reading:* A Most Fortunate Ship by Tyrone G. Martin (The Globe Pequot Press, 1980); and Jack Tars and Commodores by William M. Fowler (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984).



# USS Constitution Versus HMS Guerrière: Vignettes and Anecdotes

"A bundle of pine boards sailing under a bit of striped bunting . . . a few broadsides from England's wooden walls [will] drive the paltry striped bunting from the ocean."

*The London Times*, commenting at the outset of the war

"As we came up she began to fire. They were evidently trying to rake us. But we continued on our course, tacking and half-tacking, taking good care to avoid being raked. We came so near on one tack that an eighteen-pound shot came through us under the larboard knight-head, striking just abaft the breech of the gun to which I belonged. The splinters flew in all directions; but no one was hurt. We immediately picked up the shot, and put it in the mouth of Long Tom, a large gun loose on deck, and sent it home again, with our respects."

Gunner Moses Smith of the *Constitution*

"When the *Guerrière* began to pour shot into the *Constitution*, Lieutenant Morris, Hull's second in command, asked, 'Shall I open fire?' Hull quietly replied, 'Not yet.' The question was repeated when the shots began to tell on the *Constitution*, and Hull again answered, 'Not yet.' When the vessels were very near each other, Hull, filled with intense excitement, bent himself twice to the deck and shouted, 'Now, boys, pour it into them!' The command was instantly obeyed. When the smoke of the broadside cleared away it was discovered that the commander, in his energetic movements, had split his breeches from waistband to knee; but he did not stop to change them during the action."

*Harper's Popular Cyclopaedia of United States History* (1887)

"At last, having gained a position about forty yards off the enemy's port quarter, Captain Hull gave the order to fire as the guns bore. . . . The effect of this carefully aimed broadside at short range was terrific. The splinters were seen to fly over the British frigate like a cloud, some of them reaching as high as the mizzen top, while the cheers of her men abruptly ceased, and the shrieks and groans of the wounded were heard. The Americans had struck their first earnest blow, and it was a staggering one. The Englishmen felt its full weight, and perhaps for the first time realized that this was no child's play."

*A History of the United States Navy* by E.S. Maclay (1893)

"The *Guerrière* returned our fire with spirit—but it passed too high, and spent its force among our light spars, rigging, and sails. Our fore-royal truck was shot away, with two pairs of halyards; the flag was hanging down tangled on the shivered mast in the presence of the enemy. This sight inspired one of

our men, familiarly called Dan Hogan, to the daring feat of nailing the standard to the mast. Without a word from anyone, he sprang into the rigging and was aloft in a moment. He was soon seen, under the fire of the enemy, who saw him too, at the topmast height, clinging on with one hand, and with the other making all fast, so that the flag could never come down unless the mast came with it."

Gunner Moses Smith of the *Constitution*

"[As the *Constitution* approached] Captain Dacres politely said to me: 'Captain Orne, as I suppose you do not wish to fight against your own countrymen, you are at liberty to go below the waterline.' It was not long after this before I retired from the quarter-deck to the cockpit. . . . Soon after I left the deck, the firing commenced on board the *Guerrière*, and was kept up almost constantly until about six o'clock, when I heard a tremendous explosion from the opposing frigate. The effect of her shot seemed to make the *Guerrière* reel and tremble as though she had received the shock of an earthquake. Immediately after this I heard a tremendous crash on deck, and was told the mizzenmast was shot away. In a few moments afterward the cockpit was filled with wounded men."

Merchant captain William Orne, a prisoner aboard the *Guerrière*

"At about half past six o'clock in the evening, after the firing had ceased, I went on deck, and there beheld a scene which it would be difficult to describe: all the *Guerrière's* masts were shot away, and as she had no sails to steady her, she lay rolling like a log in the trough of the sea. Many of the men were employed in throwing the dead overboard. The decks were covered with blood and had the appearance of a butcher's slaughterhouse; the gun tackles were not made fast, and several of the guns got loose and were surging to and from one side to the other."

Merchant captain William Orne

"The *Guerrière* was so cut up, that all attempts to get her in would have been useless. As soon as the wounded were got out of her, they set her on fire, and I feel it my duty to state that the conduct of Captain Hull and his Officers to our men has been that of a brave Enemy, the greatest care and attention being paid to the wounded. . . ."

Captain James Dacres of the *Guerrière*

"It is not merely that an English frigate has been taken . . . but that it has been taken by a *new enemy*—an enemy *unaccustomed to such triumphs*, and likely to be rendered *confident* by them."

*The London Times*, following the battle



*A painting by Michele Felice Cornè (made with the technical advice of the Constitution's commanding officer) shows the HMS Guerrière losing her mizzenmast after just fifteen minutes of furious battle. A few minutes later the British frigate lost her foremast and mainmast as well.*

captain, James Richard Dacres, from stopping an American brig three days earlier and boldly scribbling across her register a challenge to any United States frigate for a "few minutes' tête-à-tête."

The son of an admiral, Dacres was already a post-captain of six years' experience, though only twenty-eight years of age. He had commanded the *Guerrière* since the spring of 1811. The thirty-eight-gun frigate was of French origin, captured from that country in 1806. Her armament in 1812 consisted of fifty guns, in-

cluding thirty 18-pounder long guns, two 12-pounders, and eighteen 32-pounder carronades. Twenty-nine officers and sailors were currently away manning prizes, leaving the English vessel with a crew of 287 men and boys, and four women.

On the quarterdeck of the *Guerrière*, Captain Dacres watched the approach of the *Constitution* with intense interest. Uncertain of the distant ship's nationality, he handed his spy-glass to William Orne, the captain of an American brig that had recently fallen victim to the *Guerrière*, and asked his opinion. Orne replied that the other ship was unquestionably American.

The English captain seemed surprised by the boldness of the approaching adversary, but declared that "the better he behaves, the more honor we shall gain by taking him." Despite his shortage of crew members, Dacres graciously allowed ten men claiming to be Americans to leave their posts and assist the surgeon in the cockpit,





rather than fight against their countrymen. Dacres is said to have been so confident of victory that he even prepared a hogshead of molasses as refreshment for the Yankee prisoners he expected to take on board shortly.

**J**UST AFTER 5 P.M., the *Guerrière* opened fire at long range with her starboard batteries. The salvo fell short of the *Constitution* and splashed harmlessly into the sea. The British frigate then wore round 180 degrees so that her port broadside batteries faced the *Constitution*. This time, the crew's aim was closer to the mark. Two shots struck the hull of the American ship, although neither caused any appreciable damage.

At 5:20 P.M., Hull ordered the *Constitution*'s ensign and jacks hoisted to the mastheads. With her bow to the enemy, the American ship could as yet bring only a few of her guns into play.

As the *Constitution* sheared through the heavy seas

toward him, Dacres sought to maneuver the *Guerrière* into a raking position, from which the full weight of her broadside could sweep the American's deck from bow to stern. The English frigate wore several times, discharging alternate broadsides. But Hull, zigzagging slightly to counter the raking maneuvers, continued his steady approach, determined to engage the enemy at close range. Hull's gunners returned the British fire with such 24-pounders as could be brought to bear, but most of the *Constitution*'s battery remained silent.

Finally, frustrated in his attempts to rake the American ship, Dacres ordered the *Guerrière* to turn downwind on a course parallel to that of the *Constitution*. Hull in turn threw on more sail to speed his approach. On the spar and gun decks, gunners prepared a double greeting of grape and round shot.

As the *Guerrière*'s guns continued firing, the *Constitution* swiftly drew abreast of her adversary's port

beam. When she had closed to within about a "half Pistol Shot," Hull hauled down the jib and laid the main-topsail shivering to the mast, braking his momentum. The time for maneuvering had ended.

At 6:05 P.M., the first American broadside erupted with a tremendous blast of smoke and flame. The *Guerrière* reeled from the impact of hundreds of pounds of metal. Chunks of the British ship's wooden bulwarks disintegrated into swarms of deadly splinters that whizzed across the decks. Within minutes, as additional broadsides crashed into the English vessel at point-blank range, maimed and dying men filled the surgeon's cockpit.

The *Guerrière*'s gunners responded in kind, but most of their shots were aimed high, cutting up the *Constitution*'s rigging. One shot carried away the fore royal truck and several halyards, along with the flag streaming from the masthead. Undaunted by the danger of flying metal, an American seaman sprang into the rigging and lashed the flag securely to the mast.

During the battle another British shot supposedly bounced off the American frigate's sturdy hull. As legend has it, some nameless sailor exclaimed, "Huzza! Her sides are made of iron!"—thus tagging the *Constitution* with her famous nickname, "Old Ironsides."

After fifteen minutes of steady bombardment, the *Guerrière* had lost her main yard, and her hull was badly shattered. Suddenly, following another American broadside, more lines parted, and, like a falling tree, the frigate's mizzenmast toppled over the starboard side with a great crash. Captain Hull twirled his hat around his head and cried, "Huzza, boys! We've made a brig of her!" Giving three cheers, his men continued their destructive cannonade.

The *Guerrière*'s broken mizzenmast was now dragging in the water, slowing her and turning her head to starboard. As the *Constitution* surged ahead, Hull ordered the helm put over with the intention of crossing the British frigate's bow. Damage to the *Constitution*'s running rigging had reduced her responsiveness, but she still managed to complete enough of the maneuver to pour two raking broadsides into Dacres's ship, "which made great havock amongst his men on the forecastle and did great injury to his forerigging and sails."

As the *Constitution* steered past his bow, Captain Dacres tried to regain his tattered fortunes by bringing the *Guerrière* up behind the American vessel. From this position he could rake the *Constitution* at her most vulnerable point, the wide stern. But Hull anticipated the danger and ordered his helm reversed, swinging the frigate back to port.

**I**N THE MIDST of these maneuvers, the *Guerrière* overtook the *Constitution*, and her bowsprit drove across the American ship's quarterdeck like a giant lance. It became entangled in the *Constitution*'s mizzen rigging, locking the two ships together, bow to stern.

The battle now briefly entered a new phase. Captain Dacres passed the word for boarders to assemble, in-

tending first to repulse any American attack and then, if possible, to carry the battle to the enemy's decks. In such close action, however, the *Guerrière* labored under a marked disadvantage. The English marines were outnumbered by their American counterparts, fifty men to thirty-five, and most were busy assisting the gun crews on the main deck.

British Lieutenant Bartholomew Kent rushed up to the forecastle of the *Guerrière* with a party of sailors and marines, but he saw that a ready reception on the *Constitution* and the pitching of the two ships in the heavy sea would make boarding extremely difficult, if not impossible. The *Guerrière*'s exposed and crowded upper deck presented an inviting target to American marines firing from the *Constitution*'s gangway and fighting tops: A sharpshooter clipped Dacres in the back with a ball that narrowly missed being fatal, and wounded and dead sailors fell all around him.\*

The Americans also suffered during the heated exchange of small-arms fire. Lieutenant Charles Morris, Hull's second in command, mounted the taffrail along the *Constitution*'s stern and, after warning Hull that the enemy was massing to board, attempted to lash the two ships together by securing the *Guerrière*'s bowsprit to the *Constitution*'s main brace. But before he could accomplish this a ball struck him in the abdomen and hurled him to the deck. Marine Lieutenant William Bush then leapt to the taffrail, sword in hand, crying, "Should I Board Her?" But he was almost immediately shot in the head and killed.

On the lower deck, one of the enemy's bow guns fired at point-blank range through the *Constitution*'s stern windows, directly into Hull's cabin. Burning wads from the gun ignited a brief fire in the cabin but the shot caused surprisingly little damage. Another salvo from several bow guns killed two Americans and wounded a third.

The *Constitution*'s forward momentum finally carried her free, ending any possibility of a boarding action. While the two ships had been in contact, however, the jerking motion of the *Guerrière*'s bowsprit over the American's quarter had slackened the English frigate's forestay—rigging vital to the support of her foremast. The mast had been damaged earlier in the battle by several double-headed shots, and some of its supporting shrouds had been torn away. As the two frigates drew apart, the weakened mast tottered and then crashed overboard. As it fell, the heel of the foremast struck the mainstay, bringing the *Guerrière*'s mainmast down, too. The mass of wreckage trailed over the starboard side, leaving the British frigate a crippled hulk with three splintered stumps for masts. The time was 6:30 P.M.; only twenty-five minutes had elapsed since the battle had begun.

\*"So close together were the two ships at this moment, that an American sailor, having discharged his boarding pistol and missed his aim, threw the weapon itself and struck an English sailor [with it] on the chest."





WITH HIS ENEMY DISABLED, Hull decided to haul off and make some quick repairs. He ordered the fore and main courses set, and sailed eastward out of gun range. For the next thirty minutes the Americans were busily employed replacing the braces and halyards that had been shot away.

Captain Dacres, too, set his crew to work clearing away wreckage. He faced a desperate situation: without the stabilizing effect of masts and sails, the *Guerrière* rolled terribly in the trough of the heavy sea, dipping her gun ports underwater and sending loose cannon and shot ricocheting across the decks. Dacres's only hope now lay in rigging a jury mast and getting his ship before the wind. The English crew got up a spar on the stump of the foremast and loosed the spritsail, but the makeshift rig failed immediately.

At 7:00 P.M., the *Constitution* wore round and took up a raking position on the *Guerrière*'s port bow. Dacres called his remaining officers together, and all agreed that further resistance was senseless. The jack was torn from the remains of the mizzenmast and the *Guerrière* surrendered.

Captain Hull sent a boat under the command of Lieutenant George Read to learn the name of his adversary and to take possession of her. Upon boarding the vanquished frigate, Read and his crew encountered a scene that bordered on the nightmarish. American midship-

*With the battle ended, a boarding party from the Constitution rows across to the mastless, wallowing hulk of the Guerrière. The victors found that the English frigate had suffered more than seventy casualties, and, with some thirty holes below the waterline, their prize was taking on water so fast that she soon had to be abandoned.*

man Henry Gilliam, who as a member of a boarding party spent the night aboard the *Guerrière*, later wrote that "pieces of skulls, brains, legs, arms and blood lay in every direction and the groans of the wounded were almost enough to make me curse the war." At least fifteen Englishmen had been killed and sixty-two wounded in the battle. The American losses amounted to seven killed and seven wounded.

Throughout the night the *Constitution*'s men worked feverishly, ferrying prisoners off of the *Guerrière* and splicing their own ship's damaged rigging. The morning of August 20 found the *Constitution* still swarming with activity. By daylight it had become apparent that the *Guerrière*—"a perfect Wreck, having many Shot holes between wind, and water . . . and her upperwork shattered to pieces"—could not remain afloat much longer. Dacres would later testify that thirty shots had pierced

*Continued on page 47*





The USS Constitution never lost a battle, but age and neglect nearly sank her. Thanks to a concerned public, she endures today as America's most honored naval relic.

# "Her Thunders Shook the Mighty Deep"

by Harold Holzer

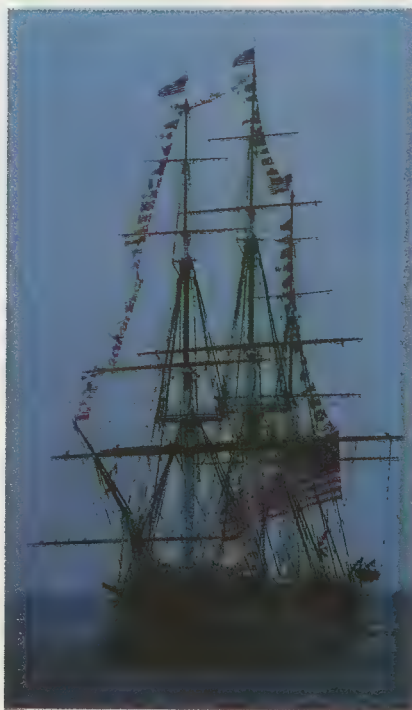
Photographs by Robert de Gast

**S**HE IS DOCKED in the shadow of Boston's 221-foot-high Bunker Hill Monument, yet somehow seems to dwarf it. Her berth is near that of a World War II destroyer that was swifter and more powerful, yet she overwhelms it. The USS *Constitution* sets sail now only once a year—for a July Fourth "turnaround" cruise to equalize her exposure to the elements. Yet she seems fit and seaworthy, as invincible as ever.

She is a relic, to be sure (although only a tenth of her original structure and fittings survive), but she is also the oldest commissioned warship afloat. Navy personnel still serve on her, care for her, and moreover, live on board. (Her original crew would be shocked to discover the 25-inch color television now dominating the crew's quarters.)

Part illusion, part museum, the ancient frigate lives on at Pier One of the Old Charlestown Navy Yard, just as surely as she lives in history and myth. Defying the odds, she has survived. But she very nearly didn't.

Forty battles failed to pierce the *Constitution's* legendary, seemingly impenetrable hull—hence her 175-year-old nickname, "Old



Ironsides"—but neglect and indifference repeatedly threatened her. As one historian put it, the *Constitution* "more often came closer to destruction at the hands of her own people than through enemy action." At various points in her long career, a poet, a politician, and a school-

teacher helped to save her from being demolished.

Designed by Joshua Humphreys and Josiah Fox, a pair of unlikely, antiwar Quakers (their church reportedly disapproved), the *Constitution* was one of six frigates authorized for the fledgling Federal Navy in 1794. She was built at Harrt's Shipyard in Boston, just across the harbor from where she is berthed today. Well-known local artisan Paul Revere supplied much of her metalwork, for which he charged \$3,820.

The big frigate cost a then-staggering \$302,718, an amount as demanding on young America's economy as a nuclear aircraft carrier is on the country's today. But by the period's standards the *Constitution* was worth every pre-inflation dollar: she was larger and more powerful than any contemporary European frigate and fast enough to elude any ship-of-the-line. With a crew of 450 officers and seamen, the *Constitution* was more heavily manned than her European counterparts, and her guns were of larger caliber. (Although the warship was designed for forty-four guns, for most of her career she carried at least fifty.) Her oak frames and

*Stern-to-stem close-ups attest to the shipwright's artful blending of beauty and function in eighteenth-century sail.*



planking were as much as twenty inches thick—as heavy as those for most ships-of-the-line. But for all her bulk, the frigate's eighteen sails, totaling 42,000 square feet (nearly an acre) in area, helped her to reach speeds of more than thirteen knots.

A masterpiece of the shipwright's art, the *Constitution* was the product of dozens of highly specialized trades at the zenith of the age of fighting sail. Forests from Maine to Georgia were scoured for the best timber for her masts, spars, and hull. Even today the frigate's size and complexity are impressive. She measures 200 feet high at the tip of her mainmast, is 204 feet long from billethead to taffrail, and spans more than 40 feet in beam. At 2,200 tons, she displaces more than the all-steel destroyer moored at nearby Pier Two. The director of the USS

Constitution Museum has aptly described her as "the greatest surviving technological achievement from eighteenth-century America."

**T**HE CONSTITUTION proved easier to build than to launch. So massive that she stuck to her building ways during at least two aborted launchings, the frigate was finally coaxed into the water on October 17, 1797, with Boston's citizens half-expecting a tidal wave from her delayed entry. Onlookers were actually warned to stay off the wharves or risk being swept away. But they lined the shores anyway, for this vessel, this event, were special. The ship had been christened *Constitution* by George Washington himself, probably to mark the tenth anniversary of the Constitutional Convention he had chaired. That connec-

tion was recognized by a local newspaper, which reported a few days after the launch that "the best judges have pronounced CONSTITUTION, like its archetype, to be a perfect model of elegance, strength, and durability."

Despite the fanfare, the *Constitution's* initial service—operations against French privateers in the West Indies—proved unremarkable. But in 1803 she was sent to the Mediterranean as flagship of a squadron ordered to put down Barbary interference with American merchant vessels. There the *Constitution* blockaded and later bombarded the shores of Tripoli.

The frigate's enduring fame was earned later, during the War of 1812, in fierce battles with the HMS *Guerrière* [described on pages 12-23], the HMS *Java*, and in a celebrated 1815





engagement against the twin threats *Cyane* and *Levant*. Each time, the *Constitution* emerged victorious, thrilling the nation and inspiring tumultuous welcoming receptions back home. By the conflict's end, "Old Ironsides" had emerged as an authentic legend, a glorious symbol of America's rise from weak infant nation to naval superpower.

Following the war, the *Constitution* was laid up for six years of repair work. Subsequently she served as flagship of America's Mediterranean fleet for two tours, "showing the flag" and protecting American trade. In 1828 the frigate returned to Boston. There naval inspectors found, among other problems, that her decks and planks had warped badly. They declared "Old Ironsides" unseaworthy and recommended that she be broken up.

That decision outraged a young poet named Oliver Wendell Holmes. He expressed his indignation in a brilliant verse that was printed in countless newspapers, causing a sensation and inspiring a flood of protests against the Navy's plans. As Holmes wrote in "Old Ironsides":

*Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!  
Long has it waved on high,  
And many an eye has danced to see  
That banner in the sky;  
Beneath it rung the battle shout,  
And burst the cannon's roar;—  
The meteor of the ocean air  
Shall sweep the clouds no more!*

*Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,  
Where knelt the vanquished foe,  
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,  
And waves were white below,*

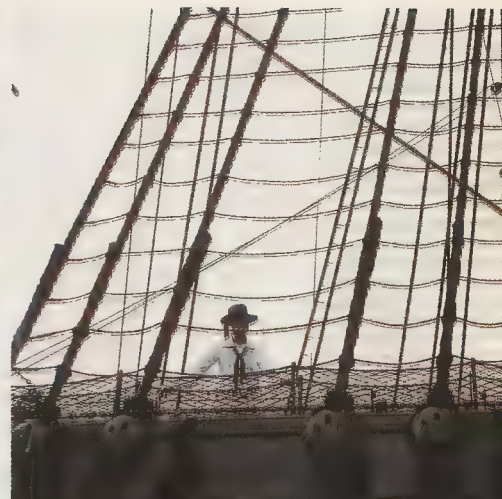
*No more shall feel the victor's tread,  
Or know the conquered knee;—  
The harpies of the shore shall pluck  
The eagle of the sea!*

*Oh, better that her shattered hulk  
Should sink beneath the wave;  
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,*

*And there should be her grave;  
Nail to the mast her holy flag,  
Set every threadbare sail,  
And give her to the god of storms,  
The lightning and the gale!*

The "harpies of the shore" were rebuffed. America decided it was not ready to give the *Constitution* to "the god of storms" or the indignity of the wreckers. By 1833 Congress had contributed sufficient funds to finance a major rebuilding project. Two years later, "Old Ironsides"—admittedly more a symbol now than

*Vignettes of America's most durable warship: a detail of the wheel, 24-pounders on the gun deck; a muzzle's-eye view of carronade and long gun; one of the frigate's ornate gangway boards; routine maintenance; and a twenty-one-gun salute on "turnaround" day.*



a first-line warship—was ready to return to sea.

But first a controversy erupted over, of all things, the vessel's new figurehead, a life-size carving of President Andrew Jackson. Its installation had set off a furious debate, with Jackson's opponents declaring heretical the notion of so honoring a living president—and worse yet, an *army* rather than a *navy* man. One stormy night a merchant seaman sawed off the carving's head and returned with it to Boston, where it became a favorite showpiece at anti-Jackson political events. When the president was told of the kidnapping, he reportedly exclaimed that he had always hated the likeness anyway, adding of the vandal: "Give that man a postmaster's job." Nonetheless, within a few months the figurehead was re-

paired, and like it or not, Jackson remained immortalized on the ship's prow for two generations.

Over the next twenty years, the *Constitution* enjoyed leisurely service, carrying American diplomats to and from Europe, patrolling the Pacific coast of South America, and eventually embarking on a well-publicized, round-the-world goodwill tour that covered more than 52,000 miles in a then-impressive 495 days at sea. In the 1850s, the *Constitution* was dispatched to the African coast to intercept slave traders. The still-imposing warship was even able to seize the slaver *Gambrell* in 1853—but this was to be her last active naval engagement. By 1855 she was undergoing yet another extensive overhaul back in the United States.

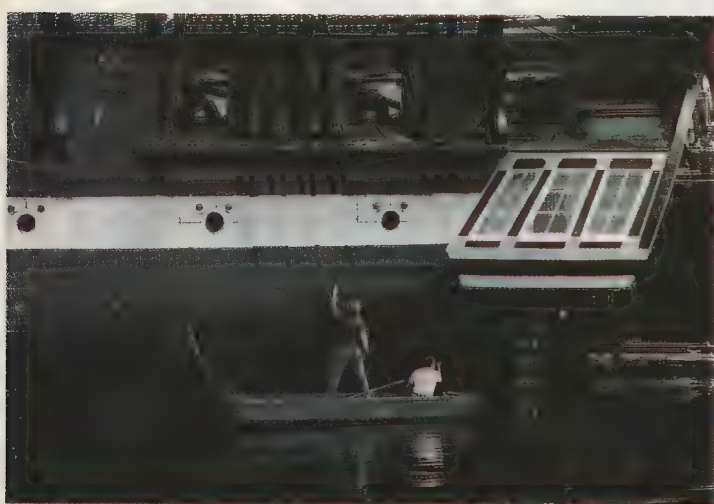
When the Civil War began in

1861, ushering in the age of armored warships, the *Constitution's* utility came into question again. Many Northerners also feared that keeping her berthed near the U.S. Naval Academy in slaveholding Maryland exposed her to danger from Confederate attack. So the *Constitution* sailed again, this time to Newport, Rhode Island, where she served as a training ship for the remainder of the rebellion.

Six years later, inspectors again found the ship decomposing. This time restoration was ordered without delay, and the *Constitution* was refitted at the Philadelphia Shipyard, emerging in time to set sail for France on March 4, 1878, to deliver a cargo of exhibits for the Universal Exposition in Paris.

Returning with the same cargo the following year, the frigate ran





aground, and later lost her rudder, which had to be rebuilt in Lisbon. For two years the Navy kept the *Constitution* close to home, again utilizing her as a training vessel until 1881, when, unable to complete a cruise, she returned to New York Harbor. When she was towed back to Portsmouth Navy Yard in 1883, a young Massachusetts Congressman named John F. Fitzgerald—grandfather of a future president—found her in shocking disrepair. Warning that “unless the government did something, the old frigate . . . would soon be at the bottom of Portsmouth Harbor,” Fitzgerald made an impassioned plea in the House of Representatives, and funds were hurriedly appropriated. Restoration was undertaken, but sadly it proved a patchwork job. The ship was durable enough to be

feted in an 1897 one-hundredth birthday celebration, but by 1905 she was again found to be rotting so rapidly that some naval officers urged she be towed to sea and used for target practice.

Again, Americans objected loudly—and again Congress came up with funding, this time \$100,000, to undertake desperately needed repairs. Once refurbished, the *Constitution* settled into a new role as a floating museum in Boston Harbor. But undetected at the time was unceasing decay that by 1925 presented yet another crisis. This time, however, Congress refused to appropriate *any* funds, and for a time it appeared that “Old Ironsides” would be left to sink slowly into Boston Harbor. But Beacon Hill schoolteacher Elizabeth Frye Leach (who died in 1987 at age ninety-one)

launched an effort by schoolchildren to raise pennies for the ship’s repairs, triggering a coast-to-coast fund-raising campaign that generated some \$650,000. Congress reluctantly added \$300,000 more, and the *Constitution* emerged from her most extensive overhaul yet in exquisite condition.

In 1931 the *Constitution* embarked on a three-year tour of ninety American ports, covering 22,000 miles (all under tow) and attracting more than four million visitors. She returned to Boston Harbor at last universally regarded as an inviolable national landmark, and Congress promptly passed legislation authorizing money in perpetuity to “equip and repair” her as needed. The last such overhaul, from 1973 to 1976, cost some \$4.4 million.







TODAY, more than a decade later, the *Constitution* still appears to be in splendid condition. Visitors will observe that workers are constantly painting, caulking, and cleaning her—struggling to stay ahead of the elements in a continual battle to maintain her pristine condition.

Against this backdrop of continuous maintenance, visitors throng the pier for guided tours led by the enlisted men who live and work on the ship. These visits embrace everything from the sublime—the magnificently symmetrical spar deck, complete with the double ship's wheel that often took *four* men to steer—to the primitive—the ship's "head" that was set at the extreme head of the ship (hence its name) to keep odors off the deck, and that was flushed by the natural crashing of the bow into the sea.

The frigate's two upper decks are dominated by her imposing main armament. On the spar deck, two bow chasers and twenty stubby carronades line the bulwarks. Weighing over a ton apiece, the carronades fired a thirty-two-pound ball and were highly destructive at close range. On the gun deck below, thirty-two long guns (some, ironically, manufactured by a future enemy, Great Britain) peer through the gunports. Mounted on wheeled carriages, these powerful weapons weigh nearly three tons each. Their twenty-four-pound shot were capable of penetrating twenty inches of oak at a thousand yards. Guides point out that the six- to fourteen-man gun crews were expected to fire a shot every forty seconds in battle, and had to be on constant guard against the cannons' violent twelve-foot recoil.

Amidships on the gun deck is the grog tub where eighteenth- and nineteenth-century seamen were issued their twice-daily ration of rum. Here, too, is the "scuttlebutt," the barrel where sailors received their meager ration of "fresh" water (to drink or bathe with—their choice) and where they gathered to exchange gossip and news (hence the second meaning of the word "scuttlebutt").

Near the eight-man bilge pump, over which seamen labored for

hours to force out the 300 gallons of water "Old Ironsides" took in every day, is the massive anchor capstan, around which as many as seventy-five men tramped, straining to hoist the ship's five-thousand-pound anchors.

The massive galley stove dominates the forward area of the gun deck, and nearby is the "manger" where livestock were kept for slaughter. Even the "barber's chair" remains, used in its day not only for "crew's cuts" (another navy term that has entered our vocabulary) but for minor surgery as well.

Even though a telephone rings occasionally, temporarily shattering the mystique of these engaging tours, a visit to the "berthing" level below cannot help but bring visitors

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*The USS Constitution is berthed in Boston's Charlestown Navy Yard, a National Historical Site. A ten-minute drive from downtown Boston, the yard is accessible by Routes 1 and 93 as well as by public transportation. The Constitution is open 9:30-3:50 daily, and admission is free. Any visit should also include a tour of the USS Constitution Museum, where numerous exhibits provide a more thorough understanding of the ship and her place in history. Located adjacent to the pier, the museum is open daily 9:00-5:00 (10:00-4:00 in winter). A modest admission fee applies.*

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back to the days of the War of 1812. Here, in poorly ventilated quarters barely five feet high, 225 sailors at a time fitfully dozed elbow to elbow in hammocks suspended from the overhead wooden beams.

Officers, of course, lived better. Aft on the berthing deck is the so-called "officers' country"—the wardroom, a central parlor where the ship's elite ate and relaxed, flanked by miniscule cabins barely large enough to contain a bed.

The captain (and admiral, if one was aboard) occupied roomier quarters in the stern portion of the gun deck. High above the captain's desk—the original used between 1813 and 1815—is an open skylight through which he could bark orders without climbing on deck, and through which, conversely, braver sailors occasionally dared to throw

crumpled complaints down to the captain. (If caught they were subject to whipping.) And, yes, the captain and admiral had their own private "heads"—although the location of these facilities in the glass-windowed quarter-galleries must have discouraged their use when the ship was alongside a pier.

Details throughout the ship offer endless fascination: a metal-lined "light box" designed to illuminate the ammunition magazines without subjecting the powder in them to the danger of fire and explosion; the ship's primitive heating system—heated cannonballs suspended from the overheads in thick black pails; the sickbay, strategically placed near the bow where patients would experience the most sea-sickening turbulence, thus discouraging malingering; the officers' sleeping "racks," five-feet-six inches long for Navy men, six-feet long for Marines (who were presumably taller); and a sobering display of the primitive but deadly ammunition the ship once used, including antipersonnel "cannister shot" filled with glass and scrap metal. Life for seamen under sail was obviously grim, demanding, and sometimes frightening, and that atmosphere is preserved aboard today's *Constitution*. And the ship accomplishes what no textbook or tract can do nearly as well: it recreates the earliest days of a new nation's courageous ventures out to sea.

What Oliver Wendell Holmes called "the meteor of the ocean air" has seen no ocean for half a century, yet she has come to symbolize the long, unbroken line of American naval might that began on board her decks. On the day the *Constitution* was launched 190 years ago, one of her builders expressed the dream that he was "conducting into the ocean a powerful agent of national justice, which hope dictates may become the just pride and ornament of the American name."

That hope has been fulfilled: the pride is restored, and his vision lives. ★

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**Betsy Patterson Bonaparte was spurned by Napoleon despite marriage to his brother. Her obsession with nobility prompted a move to strip citizenship from titled Americans.**

# The Phantom Amendment & the Duchess of Baltimore

by W. H. Earle

**A** “PHANTOM AMENDMENT”—an amendment that was not an amendment—was mistakenly added to the U.S. Constitution in 1817. Appearing in a version of the Constitution printed for members of the House of Representatives, the “non-amendment” threatened to strip citizenship from Americans who accepted “any title of nobility . . . from any emperor, king, prince, or foreign power. . . .” As its appearance in an official publication indicates, most lawmakers thought the phantom amendment had indeed been ratified by the states sometime between its approval by Congress in 1810 and its appearance in the

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*Once “the reigning beauty of Baltimore,” Elizabeth Patterson won the heart of Jérôme Bonaparte (brother of the First Consul of France) and later the admiration of European “high society.” In 1810 fear that she and Bo, her son by Jérôme, might extend Napoleon’s dictatorial reach to the United States prompted the introduction of a constitutional amendment stripping Americans of their citizenship if they accepted titles of nobility.*

Constitution in 1817. However, one dubious congressman, Weldon Nathaniel Edwards of North Carolina, launched an investigation that showed the amendment had fallen one state short of ratification. It was subsequently deleted from the Constitution. But the phantom amendment kept appearing in American history books for decades after the House had corrected its mistake. Many years later, constitutional scholars became intrigued by the would-be amendment. Why had it been proposed at all? What accounted for its speedy passage through Congress and several state legislatures virtually unopposed—and without explanatory comment in legislative journals or the contemporary press?

No one knew. The best suggestion anyone could offer was that the amendment might have had something to do with “the presence of Jérôme Bonaparte in this country . . . and his marriage to a Maryland lady.”

And this theory is almost certainly correct—as long as we concentrate on the “Maryland lady.” She was Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte—Betsy Bonaparte, the lovely, witty, tragic, vain, ambitious, calculating “Duchess of Baltimore”—and the phantom amendment is her ironic monument.

ONE DAY in 1803, two young women stood near a window in a house in Baltimore. One was eighteen-year-old Betsy Patterson, the other was her best friend.

Betsy's companion noticed two young men, strangers to both women, approaching the house.

"That man will be my husband," she said suddenly, pointing to the taller of the two strangers. (And, indeed, so he became.)

"Very well," said Betsy, "I will marry the other one."

Betsy was pleased to discover later that the stranger was Jérôme Bonaparte, youngest brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, First Consul of France. And Jérôme was delighted to have attracted the attention of the reigning beauty of the small American seaport he was visiting. On Christmas Eve in 1803, a few months after their first meeting (and despite Betsy's father's misgivings and the suggestion of the French chargé in Washington that Jérôme consult his brother first), Jérôme and Betsy were married.

The young couple's extensive American honeymoon tour could only be called triumphal—although the acclaim they encountered was far from unanimous. Most Americans welcomed Jérôme enthusiastically for the sake of his brother's fame, but some were cool because of Napoleon's increasingly apparent dictatorial instincts. Similarly, while almost everyone acknowledged that happiness was transforming the "reigning beauty of Baltimore" into "the most beautiful woman in America," some objected to the flimsy French frocks she wore to display that beauty. While Betsy's gowns doubtlessly pleased the lecher who observed that "all the clothes worn by [Madame Bonaparte] might have been put in my pocket," the staid ladies of Washington were *not* pleased when a party to honor the newlyweds was disrupted by crowds at the windows staring at the "almost naked woman." The stuffy matrons sent Betsy a round-robin letter: if she wished them to attend other social affairs to which she was invited, "she must promise to have more clothes on."

The letter probably had little effect on Betsy; head-over-heels in love, nothing could have made her unhappy during that first year of marriage. But the horizon was dark. In early 1804, Napoleon ordered French ship captains to bar passage to "the young person to whom Citizen Jérôme has connected himself." Throughout the year, the new emperor of the French made it clear that he would not accept Jérôme's American bride.

Despite these signals, Jérôme believed Betsy's beauty and charm would melt his brother's obduracy, and in March 1805, he sailed for Europe with Betsy on a ship provided by her father. When Napoleon's representative met them at Lisbon in April 1805, however, the official refused "Miss Patterson" permission to land.

Betsy flared.

"Tell your master," she responded imperiously, "that *Madame Bonaparte* is ambitious, and demands her rights as a member of the imperial family."

It did no good. Jérôme went ashore to plead with Napoleon, but he was barred from his brother's court until he had given at least a *pro forma* pledge of submission to Napoleon's will. Betsy retreated to England, where her son, Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte, was born on July 7, 1805. Shortly thereafter, she returned to America.

AT FIRST Jérôme wrote reassuringly: Betsy must be patient while he worked at assuaging Napoleon's opposition. She must never fear abandonment: "I have chosen you over a crown, and I will choose you over all the world."

Gradually, however, ambition seduced affection. By September 1806 Napoleon was sufficiently sure of Jérôme to grant him the imperial title so long withheld. A dynastic marriage for the newly minted prince was arranged that same month, followed in October by an annulment of Jérôme's American marriage—stage-managed through a French court after Pope Pius VII refused to rule the union invalid. By early 1808, after King Jérôme of Westphalia had married Catherine of Württemberg (the German princess Napoleon had chosen for him), the letters Betsy received were no longer from a husband who "breathes, dreams, works, only for you" but from her "devoted and affectionate friend."

The desertion was so gradual that no one knows for sure when in its course Betsy's heart broke. When her heart finally healed, however, it was so hardened that those who had not known her before often swore she had no heart at all.

No one, however, ever doubted Betsy's cold and calculating intellect that, along with vanity and more than a little pretension, guided her after she had accepted the fact of Jérôme's betrayal. She despised Jérôme forever after, hurling at him such epithets as "Corsican black-guard."

But she *was* able to overcome her bitterness toward Napoleon. Although Napoleon had deprived her both of husband and the glittering prospect of life at the imperial court, he also had the power to restore at least part of the dream she feared had been lost forever when Jérôme spinelessly acquiesced to the emperor's fiat. It was therefore to reconciliation with Napoleon that Betsy applied herself, writing in 1808 to General Turreau, the French ambassador to the United States, who was residing in Washington.

In shamelessly perfumed prose, Betsy made obeisance to his most puissant majesty. She acknowledged the momentous considerations of state that had obliged the emperor to dash her cherished dreams. She submitted herself to "the instrument of providence on earth [who]

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*Jérôme Bonaparte, portrayed opposite on an enamel miniature, visited the United States in 1803 as commander of the frigate Le Président. In Baltimore he met Elizabeth Patterson, and a few months later the two were married.*







*A painting by J.L.G. Ferris (above) shows Jérôme and his American bride during a stop at a Philadelphia post house while en route to New York in 1804. The couple planned to sail from there to France in Jérôme's frigate, but British cruisers and bad weather caused the trip to be postponed until 1805. They finally reached Europe, but Madame Bonaparte was "put off" again—this time by the French Emperor, who objected to his brother marrying an American. Under pressure from Napoleon, Jérôme later renounced Betsy for a kingdom and a German princess.*

arranges all human destinies."

But could not the emperor have pity on a woman and child cast into the world without resources? (Never mind that Betsy's father was one of the richest men in America.) Could not the emperor grant her an annuity?

And while he was at it, a title?

While the annuity was apparently never a sticking point with the emperor, the title was a more serious matter. Nevertheless, discussions about it degenerated into

something near farce as the exasperated French ambassador tried to deal with Betsy's ingenious but utterly transparent arguments in favor of her entry into Napoleon's aristocracy.

Her line of reasoning ran thus:

First, Betsy's son, nicknamed "Bo," must go to France, if only because Napoleon's stolid peasant mother insisted on it.

Second, Betsy must accompany Bo (who here made the first of many appearances as Betsy's poker chip). "This gift which heaven has confided to my care," Betsy declared grandiloquently, "must pass from my hands to those of the emperor."

Third, once in France, she would be compromised. She could not be *Mademoiselle* Patterson because of her child, but she could not be *Madame* Bonaparte either because Napoleon forbade her use of that name.

Fourth, this difficulty would vanish once she was neither *Mademoiselle* Patterson nor *Madame* Bonaparte but, say, Duchess of . . . whatever.

The exasperated Frenchman remonstrated: an unmarried woman could not bear a French title. As for being an unmarried mother, she need not worry; a woman



with a child in her arms was *Madame* whether or not she had a last name.

Betsy was not reassured. She did not *want* to be reassured; she wanted the title, and she repeatedly unleashed her arguments on the long-suffering ambassador. Without explicit instructions, however, Turreau could not satisfy his supplicant, and communications from his government were maddeningly noncommittal.

The impasse continued until November 1809, when Turreau learned that Betsy was seeking solace in a second marriage. The ambassador's relief at having Betsy's suit removed from his court was obliterated, however, by the fact that her prospective husband was—*sacre bleu!*—an Englishman! Betsy spread these rumors knowing that the ambassador would be galvanized by the thought of Bo, still potentially an imperial prince, in England. A hefty annuity was quickly arranged. The ambassador could not grant the title that Betsy had been angling for during the past year, but reassuring hints were evidently offered: Betsy's family soon began telling acquaintances that Bo had been acknowledged as an imperial prince while Betsy had been (or was soon to be) made the Duchess of Oldenburg.

And, with the promise of such consolation, Betsy dismissed her English suitor, diplomat Charles Oakley. Removing him from her life, one cynical observer said, "has cost her, I believe, little more effort . . . than to take off her gloves."

**B**ETSY'S PRIVATE ARRANGEMENT with the French soon became public—setting the stage for the phantom amendment. For years the Federalist party had accused Republican opponents of acting under "French influence": Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, subverted by Napoleon, subordinated American interests to those of France. Now, with Betsy known to be on Napoleon's payroll, the Federalists considered their charges proven. Had not both Jefferson and Madison entertained this lovely French agent at the presidential mansion? Was not her uncle the powerful Republican Senate leader, General Samuel Smith? Had not she made her scandalous Washington debut at the home of Sam Smith's brother, Secretary of State Robert Smith? Did not her extravagant pension—twice the salary of the president—mark her as paymistress for a system of French intrigue? Was not the ennobling of Betsy and Bo an affront to republican principles—and might it not portend some darker Napoleonic plot?

Federalist newspapers ran riot with the possibilities. Napoleon would regain the Louisiana Purchase, and "the little limb of French royalty at Baltimore" would become "The Emperor of the West." No, worse, *all of America* would fall to monarchical tyranny. "Madame Jérôme has already observed to some of her female acquaintance that in her son they beheld their future emperor!"

Republican newspapers countered this "nonsense." What court officers would "the puissant little baby" require? A Master of the Rocking Horse? They argued

that "women will bestow their hearts and their hands where they please . . ."; neither the Senator nor the Secretary of State was responsible "for a [marital] connection which they neither sought nor promoted."

Still, Republican embarrassment grew. Had not Sam Smith's boasting about his connection to Napoleon led John Quincy Adams to suggest sourly that Sam needed help from the doctor who had treated George III's madness? Had not that same sort of boasting led one member of Congress to suggest, long before Betsy's elevation, that "the prince regent of the future sovereign of America was then within the walls of the capitol"?

And thus appeared the phantom amendment, a maneuver designed to distance the "Duchess of Baltimore" from the Republican party, particularly Betsy's embarrassed uncle and his brother. The amendment was introduced in January 1810 by Republican Senator Philip Reed of Maryland, likely at the request of his fellow Republicans and fellow Marylanders, the Smiths, who were doubtless reluctant to repudiate their niece openly.

The maneuver flanked the Federalists. If they opposed the amendment, the Republicans would brand them "British partizans," voting against the measure in hope of someday receiving titles from *their* friends in the mother country. To dodge this accusation, the Federalists had to support the amendment—and thereby free the Smiths from their predicament. The phantom amendment suddenly became a nonpartisan measure, and, as such, was worthy neither of debate in Congress nor of comment in the party press (as perplexed constitutional scholars would later discover). The amendment sailed through the Senate and House by near-unanimous votes and went on to the states for ratification.

The one person whose interest in the amendment was personal rather than political (and who might therefore have spoken out despite the amendment's bipartisan support) said nothing. After Betsy's lawyer had reviewed the amendment at her request, she wrote to a French diplomat that "the proposed amendment . . . is injurious to my future prospects and vexatious in every point of view." However, she had decided "to make no representation whatever on my own part . . . to avert its future pernicious consequences."

The phantom amendment went on to be considered by state legislators. Their interest in its adoption, however, diminished with the passage of time. After all, those who had been embarrassed by Betsy's connection with Napoleon had been permanently insulated from harm: Secretary of State Robert Smith had left office, and Senator Sam Smith had become an unassailable national hero when he resumed his Revolutionary War general's rank and conducted the rockets'-red-glare-bombs-bursting-in-air defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812. Furthermore, the war and Napoleon's near-simultaneous downfall had ended questions of foreign meddling in American politics: by the time of the amendment's bizarre reappearance in the House of Representatives in 1817, it was an anachronism.



**B**UT FOR BETSY, life was just beginning anew. Only thirty in 1815, still exquisitely beautiful, with a small but adequate income derived from investments, and disentangled at last from dynastic politics, she was finally free to set foot on the European stage she had always dreamed of. "Nature never intended me for obscurity," she once wrote, and the self-assessment was accurate: her name, beauty, and tragic history made her a celebrity, and she burst upon European society like a comet. Betsy was welcomed wherever she ventured, and her wit was the talk of Europe. To those who asked why she had rejected the separate establishment Jérôme had offered her when he was still on the Westphalian throne, she answered, "Westphalia no doubt was a considerable kingdom but not large enough to hold two queens."

And why had she declined an invitation to the court of the Bourbon king who succeeded Napoleon on the French throne? Because, she said, "Ingratitude is not one of my vices."

She was pursued by titled suitors but never remarried.

Betsy obliged Bo to follow her to Europe, where he met various Bonapartes at their courts of exile. Even as he was being feted by his once-royal relatives, however, Bo wrote longingly to grandfather Patterson in Balti-

*An unusual triple portrait by Georges D'Almaine shows Elizabeth Patterson at the height of her beauty and ambition. (Completed in 1856, the picture is actually a copy of a painting made by noted artist Gilbert Stuart in 1804. Painter Thomas Sully has said, "Stuart had a beautiful picture of Jérôme's beautiful wife, which he refused to give up." Stuart had also painted Jérôme's portrait; when Sully accidentally stepped on it, Stuart reportedly said, "You needn't mind. . . . It's only a damned French barber.")*

more: "You have no idea how anxious I am to return home. I was always aware that America was the only country for me, but now I am still more firmly persuaded of it than ever."

Bo did return to America. In accordance with Betsy's wishes, he attended Harvard, and, quite contrary to Betsy's wishes, he fell in love with an American girl, Susan May Williams. Knowing his mother's disdain for untitled Americans (and knowing too of the list of eligible princesses about his age that Betsy kept), Bo in America delayed telling Betsy in Europe of his 1829 engagement until she could not return in time to prevent



his marriage. When she finally found out, Betsy was devastated.

From Florence, Italy, she wrote her father in December 1829: "I shall never cease to regret that this alliance was ever thought of. . . . I tried to give him the ideas suitable to his rank in life; having failed in that, there remains only to let him choose his own course. A parent cannot make a silk purse of a sow's ear; and you found that you could never make a sow's ear of a silk purse. It was impossible to bend my talents and my ambition to the obscure destiny of a Baltimore housekeeper, and it was absurd to attempt it after I had married the brother of an emperor. I had not the meanness of spirit to descend from such an elevation to the deplorable condition of being the wife of an American. . . . When I first heard that my son could condescend to marry any one in Baltimore, I nearly went mad. . . . I repeat, that I would have starved, died, rather than have married in Baltimore. . . ."

**E**VENTUALLY, HOWEVER, Betsy followed Bo's lead in returning to Baltimore. She disliked the place that she had once described in a letter as "a trading town, where everything was disgusting to my tastes, and where everything contrasted so strongly with my wishes." But expatriate life was too costly to be supported by the rents on her Baltimore properties. "The duchess" resigned herself to provincial obscurity. The years passed uneventfully.

Then the Revolution of 1848 overthrew Napoleon's Bourbon successors. The name Bonaparte was revived! Bo's cousin Louis became president of France! He became emperor! The empire on which Betsy had pinned all her worldly hopes was restored.

The new emperor was one of Bo's closest friends among his cousins. Naturally Bo, now nearly fifty, congratulated Louis. Quite as naturally, Louis invited Bo to visit. Bo accepted.

The new emperor's friendly feelings toward Bo promptly involved them both in a family feud. Ever since Napoleon's annulment of Jérôme and Betsy's marriage, aspersions had occasionally been cast on the circumstances surrounding Bo's birth. Louis now removed that shadow from his friend's history by issuing an acknowledgement of Bo's legitimacy.

Immediately Bo's father objected. Louis's action cast into doubt the legitimacy of Jérôme's children by his second marriage. Who would succeed to his hereditary titles? That matter could be readily resolved. A decree simultaneously reaffirming Bo's legitimacy and depriving him of hereditary rights was not beyond the Bonapartes' slippery lawyers, but there was one additional problem.

It was Bo's name. Bo and Betsy had generally used the name Patterson in Europe to avoid complications inherent in the name Bonaparte, but Bo was now being called Jerome Napoleon *Bonaparte* in official proclamations. Just as Napoleon had objected to Betsy's being known as Madame *Bonaparte*, so too did Jérôme now

object to his son's use of that name.

And, just as Betsy had proposed a title to solve her own difficulties, so too did Louis now propose a title to resolve Jérôme's complaints about Bo. Would his cousin like to be Duke of Sartene?

Triumph! The culmination of Betsy's hopes! She often said that her ambition was not to be on the throne, but near the throne. If she could not be a duchess, what better consolation than to be mother of a duke?

Bo turned it down.

Clearly, he resented the imputation that he was not entitled to the name he regarded as rightfully his own. Perhaps, too, he feared rendering himself ridiculous in the eyes of Baltimore neighbors who habitually winked when they called his mother "the duchess."

And maybe that is all there was to Bo's refusal, but surely what is known of the bizarre history of the phantom amendment entitles one to wonder whether Bo's refusal of his cousin's offer might not also represent the phantom amendment's last ironic appearance in American history. After all, Louis's offer was made in 1855, and the phantom amendment had appeared as a properly adopted part of the Constitution in American history books as late as 1843. Indeed, as recently as 1847 the editor of *Niles' Register*, the national newsweekly published in Bo's own town of Baltimore, had indicated his belief that the phantom amendment was part of the Constitution. Was Bo, like the editors of the history books and of *Niles' Register*, one of those who never realized the phantom amendment had not actually been adopted? And if Bo did believe the Constitution's amendments included the phantom with its threat to strip citizenship from native-born sons and daughters of Americans, might he not have feared what would happen when he, the British-born son of a Frenchman, returned to the United States with a title?

Admittedly, there is no evidence to substantiate these speculations, but it would be entirely in keeping with the twisted tale of the phantom amendment if the last curve in its peculiar passage through history should thwart yet again the oft-disappointed woman who had caused its introduction in the first place.

Enough. Whatever Bo's reasons, his mother's anger over his decision widened the estrangement that had separated them ever since Bo's marriage. Although both lived in Baltimore, Bo did not see his mother for years before his death in 1870. Betsy outlived her son by nearly a decade. She occupied a room in a shabby boarding house, venturing out from time to time in the finery of a bygone era to collect rents. Her tales of that romantic age were a staple of her conversation at the boarding house dinner table until, in 1879, at the age of ninety-four, still frustrated and disappointed, she died in a room crowded with her mementos—a relic among relics. ★

*W. H. Earle is a Baltimore, Maryland, writer whose current project is a cumulative index to Niles' Register, a nineteenth-century newsweekly.*

# George Gipp: “One for the Gipper!”

by Joseph Gustaitis

NOTRE DAME'S FIGHTING IRISH had completed their second consecutive undefeated year of football, and the dinner commemorating the 1920 season was in full swing at the Oliver Hotel in South Bend, Indiana. Peerless gridiron star George Gipp, who had just had one of the finest college football careers in history, was in attendance. His fellow team members were not surprised when he left early; they assumed he feared he would be asked to make a speech, something he characteristically avoided.

Actually, Gipp could not have spoken if he had wanted. He had been fighting a serious strep throat for weeks. Coach Knute Rockne had sent Gipp to the infirmary, but, according to subsequent Notre Dame legend, the superstar left without his doctor's permission the Friday before the Northwestern game. He supposedly told Rockne he was fit enough to play and so was allowed to suit up. Gipp was going to sit out the game, but during the fourth quarter Irish fans clamored to see him play, even though the team had a 26-point lead. Rockne sent the halfback in for a few plays before the game ended in victory for the Irish.

In the days that followed the football dinner, Gipp's illness worsened, developed into pneumonia, and, before long, “Rockne's Golden Boy” had passed from this world into American folklore.

Gipp's story has all the elements of a movie, and in fact it became one in 1940—*Knute Rockne: All American*, starring twenty-nine-year-old Ronald Reagan as the Gipper. The Gipp legend also echoes throughout Notre Dame's halls and is traditionally retold by students and alumni each football season.

It is the same now-famous story Rockne told in 1928 to a 5-4 Irish team about to battle arch-rival Army, a four-to-one favorite. “You've all heard of George Gipp, of course,” Rockne began. The players knew about Gipp; he was already part of the aura surrounding Notre Dame. Rock explained that he had been at Gipp's bedside when the athlete died, and then the coach recounted the dying player's last request: “Rock, some time when the team is up against it, when things are wrong and the breaks are beating the boys—tell them to go in there and win just one for me.”

“Well,” said Rockne, “I've never used Gipp's request until now. This is the time. It's up to you. Let's

get one for the Gipper!”

Skeptics have doubted that Gipp ever uttered those last words. But Rockne always insisted that he did, and Gipp's teammate Hunk Anderson has claimed that Rockne tearfully recounted the final request only minutes after the player died. Certainly there is no doubt the speech fired up Rockne's underdog squad, for witnesses agreed that such inspired football had never been seen before. And when halfback Jack Chevigny tied the score with a touchdown, he yelled the now-immortal line, “There's one for the Gipper!”

The following Monday a headline in the *New York Daily News* read: “Gipp's Ghost Beat Army: Irish Hero's Deathbed Request Inspired Notre Dame.” The Irish had defeated the Cadets 12-6.

The legendary player was born in Laurium, Michigan, on February 18, 1895, the son of a Congregationalist minister. Surprisingly, Gipp did not play on his high school teams, but he was a basketball star at the YMCA and a baseball standout in the local amateur league. Notre Dame admitted him on a baseball scholarship in 1916, and that was the only sport he had wanted to play for the Fighting Irish. But, as legend has it, while Gipp was tossing a baseball on a Notre Dame field in September of that year, he was beamed by an errant football punted from the adjacent gridiron. He angrily booted the ball back seventy yards, and an awed Rockne invited him to a tryout. But this story is only a myth; Rockne has written that he merely spied Gipp practice-kicking in a field and asked him to come out for the freshman team.

Famed football coach and publisher Pudge Hefelfinger once called Gipp “the most versatile back of all time,” and Rockne thought only Jim Thorpe was better. A well-muscled six-footer of 180 pounds, Gipp ran the 100-yard dash—in uniform—in a blinding 10.2 seconds, and he routinely drop-kicked field goals of 50-plus yards (even a 62-yarder in 1917). The Gipper also had a deadly passing arm. On defense, Rockne said “nobody ever completed a pass against him”—which was no figure of speech; it was literally true.

Gipp's greatest day was against Army at West Point on October 20, 1920. He ran for 150 yards, passed for another 123, and returned punts and kickoffs for 207 more as Notre Dame whipped the Cadets 27-17. Gipp



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had personally led the Irish to three wins in a row over Army, *the* powerhouse team of the era. No longer was Notre Dame some upstart Hoosier school: it had earned a place among the college football elite.

Gipp's virtuoso display against Army may have had something to do with his having bet \$400 on the outcome. "I'm the finest free-lance gambler ever to attend Notre Dame," he once said. His athletic gifts included the fine motor skills that make a pool shark; he was also a deadly poker player and rolled dice as successfully as he punted. Gipp routinely fleeced the gamblers and marks at the local hotels, although, as author Francis Wallace has pointed out, "he never played with students for much more than fun."

Rockne must have suspected *something* was going on; it was he who, with the support of upset alumni and townies, helped get Gipp reinstated when the administration expelled him early in 1920 for cutting class and spending too much time shooting pool. Rockne was unusually forgiving with his wayward star, even when Gipp sloughed through practice after a night out on the town.

"I came to know a lot—and yet little—about George Gipp," Rockne once recalled. "He lived quietly, had no single close buddy, nor even a circle of good friends. . . . And, to our disappointment, he skipped study room more than [Coach Jesse] Harper and I liked. Yet it was impossible for anyone not to like him and enjoy every moment spent with him. He was pleasant—but never cheerful. Friendly, but never overtly congenial."

At the end, Gipp weighed eighty pounds, and Notre Dame's Sacred Heart Church was crowded with students praying for his recovery. He learned that he had become the first Notre Dame player to be named an All American, and that he had been offered baseball contracts by Chicago's White Sox and Cubs. Finally, he asked to be received into the Catholic Church and was baptized.

He died on December 14, 1920, at the age of twenty-five. "Football," Rockne said, "will never see his equal—as a player or a person." But the Gipp legend lives on in the Notre Dame football tradition. ★

*Emmy-Award-winning writer Joseph Gustaitis lives in Brooklyn, New York.*

With a wagon spring, ratchets, and imagination, inventor Elisha Otis made safe the once-hazardous elevator and allowed buildings to soar to new heights.

# A Mechanic Gave the World a Lift

by Sharon Cramer Drain

**A**N OLD WAGON SPRING and a set of ratchet bars changed the face of America—and her skyline—forever.

In 1852, Elisha Graves Otis, founder of the Otis Elevator Company, combined these elements to make his first “safety hoist.” The modern elevator, used daily by tens of millions of people to travel billions of vertical miles each year, evolved from Otis’s concept.

Although no exact date for the first mechanical lift exists, hoisting devices may date back as far as the building of the pyramids. Aristotle and Archimedes both mentioned hoists in their writings, and when Emperor Titus built the Roman Coliseum in 80 A.D., crude elevators were installed to lift the gladiators and wild animals up to the arena. A steam-powered lift was built in England in 1835, and several businesses in America manufactured mechanical hoists before the Otis Elevator Company did. Elevators before the one devised by Otis, however, lacked one important feature: safety.

When the lifting ropes, chains, or

cables broke—as they frequently did—men and cargo crashed to the bottom of the elevator shaft, injuring or killing the workers and damaging the freight. Otis’s wagon spring and ratchet bars triggered a revolution in elevator safety.

In 1852, as master mechanic for a Bergen, New Jersey, bedstead manufacturer, Elisha Otis was put in charge of building a new factory in Yonkers, New York. When company owner Josiah Maize asked Otis to include a freight elevator in the new building, the forty-one-year-old mechanic did not consider the task difficult. What he did consider was the safety angle. As Elisha’s son, Charles, later noted, “This elevator was constructed with special regard for the safety of those who should risk their lives in its use.”

Otis’s hoist featured a safety brake that incorporated a concept he had already seen in use in common ratchet mechanisms. Along the vertical guide rails at either side of his hoisting platform the inventor mounted a row of saw-toothed iron bars. At corresponding points on the platform itself, he installed sets

of iron teeth or safety dogs. The teeth were connected by mechanical linkages to an ordinary wagon spring mounted above the platform, and this in turn was fastened to the elevator’s hoisting rope. Under normal conditions, the wagon spring was held nearly flat by the weight of the elevator, preventing the teeth from touching the adjacent guide rails. If the hoisting rope parted, however, tension on the spring was instantly released, allowing it to force the teeth against the ratchet bars and preventing the elevator from falling.

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*“All safe, gentlemen, all safe!”  
Introducing his safety elevator to the world in spectacular fashion at the Crystal Palace Exposition in New York City in 1854, Elisha Graves Otis receives the plaudits of spectators after demonstrating that his lift would not fall even if the hoist rope were severed. Although Otis was not the first to build and market an elevator, the obvious advantages of his system made it the foundation of the industry.*





The idea worked.

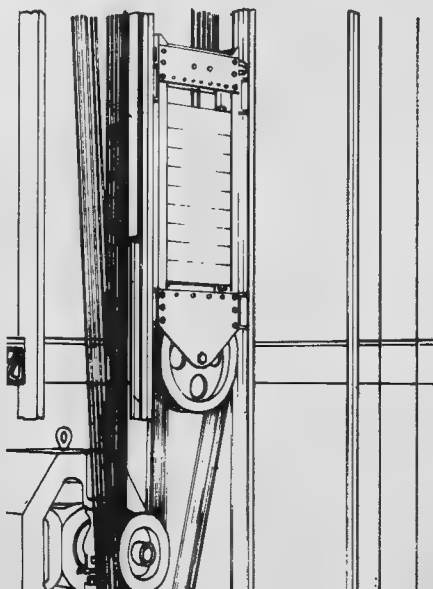
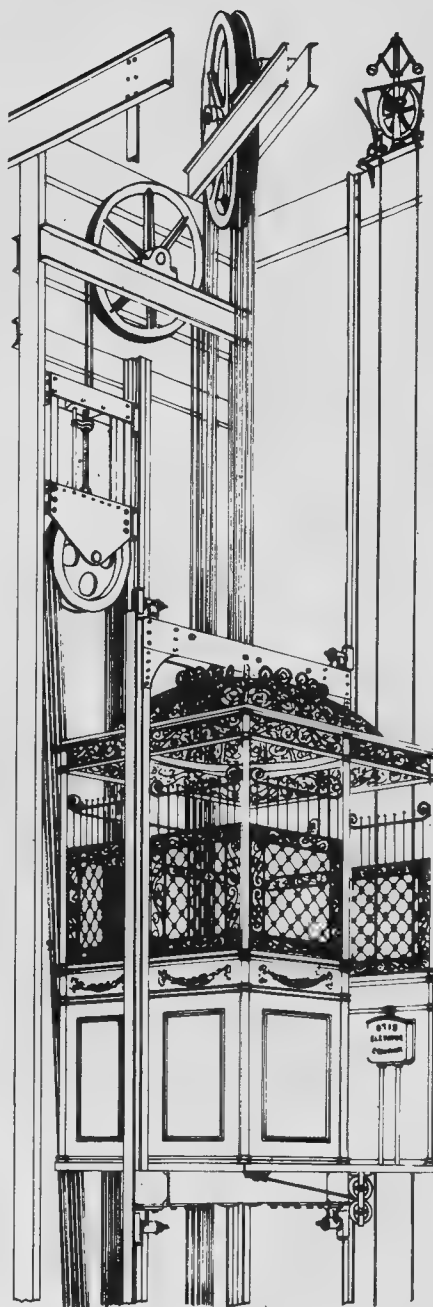
The safety hoist attracted much attention at first, but interest faded when the Yonkers Bedstead Manufacturing Company went bankrupt. With a family to support and no job, desperation clouded Otis's judgment. He was so unimpressed with the potential of his own invention that he made plans to take his wife and two young sons, Charles and Norton, west to California. He hoped to make his fortune in the Gold Rush.

Then fate intervened. Two unsolicited orders for freight elevators arrived from neighboring factories in New York. One order for two "safety hoisters" was prompted by an accident that had killed two men when an elevator fell in the Newhouse Furniture Factory. The other, from a picture frame factory, was probably intended to prevent a similar occurrence. It made good business sense to install safe freight elevators: workers who rode the hoists with the cargo often demanded double wages.

Otis rented space in the building that had housed his former employer and went into the elevator business on September 20, 1853. "I do not suppose that my father had the slightest conception at the time of what the outcome of this invention was to be," his son Charles recalled nearly sixty years later.

According to Charles, Otis never used a drawing board, a blueprint, or a prototype model. He designed his inventions freehand, without working them out on paper first. The plans for his elevator and many of his other devices (including a wood-turning lathe, railroad brake, steam plow, lift bridge, and rotary bread oven) were illustrated only as required for application to the Patent Office. He would not be known today as a "team player." "He

*Early commercial elevators were powered by steam or hydraulic systems, but electric drives, perfected during 1889-1904, eventually proved superior for use in tall buildings. This cutaway drawing shows the workings of a typical turn-of-the-century Otis electric elevator.*



needed no assistance, asked no advice, and never made much use of pen or pencil in designing his inventions," recalled Charles Otis. "He exemplified the reverse of a remark attributed to Edison who defined American genius as 2 percent inspiration and 98 percent perspiration."

"He was an inexhaustible worker, of unquestioned honesty, and had all of the personal qualities of the inventor," noted another early associate, who added that Otis "was more of an inventor and engineer than a business man. . . . Mr. Otis was well known for keeping his business file in his huge pocket-book, which he carried with him at all times."

**A**LTHOUGH first-year sales of his elevator totaled \$900, Otis's profit-and-loss statement portended trouble. The company was deeply in debt for equipment. In lieu of cash, Otis had accepted an artillery gun and carriage from Benjamin Newhouse as partial payment for Newhouse's order. Company assets amounted to \$122.71, which included a second-hand lathe, two oil cans, Otis's ledger book, and, presumably, the artillery piece.

Otis realized that the time had come for dramatic action to prevent his new enterprise from failing. In May 1854, in a triumph of inspired salesmanship, he introduced his invention to the public at the Crystal Palace Exposition—America's first world's fair—in New York City. After installing a full-sized working elevator in a prominent location in the Exposition's main building, Otis loaded boxes, barrels, and other freight on the hoisting platform. Then he boarded the elevator and had it hoisted four stories above the crowd. From that vantage point, the inventor explained his wagon-spring safety feature to the skeptical spectators.

Finally, to the curious onlookers' astonishment, Otis ordered the hoist rope cut. With a sudden jolt the elevator slipped. Spectators screamed and gasped, sure they were about to witness a fatal crash. But instead, as Otis knew it would, the safety mechanism automatically engaged the ratchet bars, and the hoist hung suspended in mid-air. Then, with an un-



characteristic display of showmanship, Otis doffed his top hat to the applauding crowd and said, "All safe, gentlemen, all safe!"

Otis's spectacular demonstration, repeated at frequent intervals, was one of the hits of the 1854 Exposition. His company's sales totaled \$2,975 that year and nearly doubled in 1855, when Otis received orders for fifteen elevators. Sales nearly doubled again in 1856, when enterprising merchant E. V. Haughwout asked Otis to build a safety hoist to lift *people*. No evidence exists that Otis had previously considered this possibility.

On March 23, 1857, Otis installed the first modern passenger elevator, powered by a steam engine, at Haughwout and Company in New York City. Haughwout's five-story building (considered tall for the day) was located at the corner of Broome Street and Broadway and housed an emporium dealing in French china and glassware. Even though the lift cost Haughwout \$300, its value as a novelty paid liberal returns in increased store traffic. The elevator traveled at an amazing forty feet per minute, and the trip to the top floor took a little over sixty seconds. (At the same rate, today's ride to the top of Chicago's 110-story Sears Tower would take more than thirty-six minutes.)

Nine years after Otis built the first safety hoist, his company was valued at \$5,000 and employed eight to ten men. Then, on April 8, 1861, just four days before the Civil War began and four months short of his fiftieth birthday, Elisha Graves Otis fell victim to a diphtheria epidemic and died at Yonkers, New York.

**O**TIS'S SONS Charles and Norton, who since boyhood had assisted their father in his engineering endeavors, took over the company and struggled to keep it going during the Civil War and the subsequent recession. "If we could get more hands we could go ahead," Charles wrote at the time, "but it requires money and a good deal more than we have got."

By 1866, however, Charles was able to note optimistically that "the panic among businessmen seems to be over. . . . There is now beginning



*The introduction of iron and steel skeletal frameworks in building construction, combined with the elevator, made the modern skyscraper possible. One of the more spectacular New York landmarks early in the twentieth century was the twenty-story Flatiron Building, completed in 1902 and equipped with six Otis elevators.*

to be some inquiry about hoisting machinery. Money matters are easier. Think we can get along pretty well now." Just six years later, the Otis Company was doing nearly \$400,000 in sales annually.

Much early business came from the hotel industry. In 1866 the St. James Hotel in New York City became the first such establishment to install a passenger elevator. In its 1869 catalogue the Otis company advertised that a hotel's upper floors were "the most desirable in the house, whence the guest makes the transit in half a minute of repose and quiet, and, arriving there, enjoys a purity and coolness of atmosphere and an exemption from noise, dust and exhalations." Before this revelation, the penthouse had usually been given to the janitor as partial payment for his services, because climbing multiple flights of stairs was considered undesirable.

Early passenger elevators were slow, but elegant. The door was usually of glass with brass grillwork, and the other three sides were wood-paneled with upholstered benches so passengers could sit comfortably during transit. In 1883, the Otis Company installed one such elevator in the main lobby of New York City's first co-op apartment house. Today, residents of 34 Gramercy Park still use the posh main elevator as well as two others installed by Otis the same year.

Talented inventors and engineers in their own right, Charles and Norton Otis continued to improve on their father's work. The brothers eventually received fifty-three patents on elevator design and safety devices.

In 1878 the Otises introduced a hydraulic elevator capable of operating at speeds of 600 to 800 feet per

*Current champion among the world's tallest self-supporting structures is the 1,815-foot CN Tower in Toronto, Canada. Four 1,200-foot-per-minute glass-walled elevators provide access to the tower's "sky pod," and another elevator continues to the world's highest observation gallery at the 1,465-foot level. Even taller structures, reaching a half-mile or more aloft, are considered to be technically feasible—in part because of the safe transportation system pioneered by Elisha Graves Otis.*

minute, much faster than conventional steam-powered lifts. At about the same time the brothers designed a governor-operated safety device capable of bringing the high-speed car to a gradual stop in an emergency.

The 1880s and 1890s saw an increase in business for the company after a young architect named William LeBaron Jenney solved a problem that had baffled builders. Tall buildings constructed before this time required the support of massive masonry foundations, and even these were limited to about ten to twelve stories. In 1885, Jenney designed a building with load-bearing walls of *steel*. He used this new technique to construct the ten-story Home Insurance Building in Chicago. Jenney's innovation brought about a construction boom.

During this same era another young architect, L. H. Sullivan (assisted by Frank Lloyd Wright), designed and built the first true skyscraper. Although Jenney and Sullivan are generally credited with fathering the skylines of America's cities, their creative genius would have been stifled had not another innovator invented the safe elevator more than thirty years before.

Realtors and investors soon realized that building up, rather than out, over expensive property meant greater business returns. The Otis brothers benefited from the boom that transformed low-lying business districts of cities into towering and distinctive skylines.

Many people finally accepted the safety of Otis elevators and grew



even more unwilling to climb multiple flights of stairs. Among those trusting souls was President James A. Garfield, who had an Otis elevator installed in the White House in 1881. (Some historians point to that as one of the most significant events of Garfield's presidency.) Several years later, the national spotlight was focused on elevator safety when William Howard Taft, who weighed more than three hundred pounds, regularly used the White House elevator.

Elevator technology took another leap upward in 1889 when the Otis Company installed the first successful electric elevator in the Demarest Building in New York City. Then, in 1904, the company established the foundation for modern high-speed elevator technology with the first gearless traction elevators, installed in the Beaver Building in New York City.

Norton Otis remained chairman of the board of the Otis Company until his death in 1905, but he also engaged in public service and in politics as a congressman from New York. Charles traveled widely after retiring from the company in 1890. He died May 24, 1927.

**D**ESPITE OTIS'S INVENTION, elevator accidents were common well into the twentieth century because not every manufacturer equipped his lifts with safety devices as reliable as the Otis Company's. The only instance of an Otis elevator falling to the bottom of its shaft occurred in New York City in 1943. An Air Force bomber crashed into the eighty-ninth floor of the Empire State Building and severed the governing cables as well as the safety devices. Nevertheless the only passenger, the operator, survived the fall from his location at the seventeenth story.

L.A. Petersen, then-president of Otis Elevator Company, explained: "This [the bomber's crash] rendered inoperative the safety equipment which understandably was not proof, nor intended to be proof, against airplane collision."

The claim of elevator safety is corroborated by insurance tables that show riding elevators to be

*Continued on page 50*



## Not a Look of Fear was Seen *Continued from page 23*

his frigate below the waterline. At 7:30 A.M., Read hailed from the prize that five feet of water were in the hold.

Clearly the *Guerrière* was beyond salvage. By 1:30 P.M., all boats had returned to the *Constitution* save one, which waited for Read and the ship's carpenters to set fire to the *Guerrière*'s storeroom. At 3:00 P.M., they rejoined the *Constitution*, and fifteen minutes later the *Guerrière* exploded, "presenting a sight the most incomparably grand and magnificent I have experienced," in the words of *Constitution* Surgeon Amos Evans.

With his ship crammed full of prisoners, Hull turned back toward port. No doubt concern over the condition of the *Constitution* influenced his decision. Although the American frigate was not nearly as badly damaged as the *Guerrière*, the wear and tear on her sails, rigging, and spars had been extensive. One shot had passed through the heel of the fore topgallant mast, and the fore and mainmasts had also been struck by the enemy's round shot. The repairs that had been started the moment firing had ceased continued for the next three days. Repair parties sent a new fore topgallant mast and yard and bent new sails to the yards. The crew also strengthened the injured masts by binding them with long splints of wood.

**B**EFORE DUSK on August 29, the *Constitution* came within sight of the Boston Lighthouse. By the morning of August 31, she once again lay at anchor off Long Wharf; four weeks and a day had passed since her departure from the harbor. A salute from the Washington Artillery greeted the frigate's arrival, and people crowded along the wharves and on housetops, cheering their naval heroes.

News of the *Constitution*'s victory over the *Guerrière* created a sensation as it swept across the country. Newspapers praised Hull and the navy for giving the nation its first encouraging news in what was shaping up to be a long, dismal war. In honor of the triumph, Congress voted Hull a gold medal and his officers silver ones. Hull and his crew also received an award of \$50,000 in lieu of the prize money they would have received had they been able to bring the *Guerrière* into port. In Boston, opponents and supporters of the war temporarily shelved their differences and held a parade for Hull. A dinner at Faneuil Hall followed.

The *Constitution*'s stunning victory came at a fortuitous time, for word was just arriving from the Northwest announcing another stupendous victory—unfortunately, one belonging to the English. On August 16, Brigadier General William Hull had surrendered Detroit and some 2,500 troops to a British and Indian force half that size. The concurrence of last names was no coincidence; the vanquished general was none other than Isaac Hull's own uncle.

In England, the account of the *Guerrière*'s surrender was received with dismay. At a court-martial held on October 2, following Dacres's parole from American

custody, the British captain attributed his defeat more to bad luck and the "unfortunate loss of our masts" (the fore and mainmasts were afterward found to be rotten at the core, according to the testimony of Dacres and the ship's carpenter) than to the weight and accuracy of the American gunnery. The court supported Dacres's assertion and fully exonerated him.

But five months after her historic encounter, the *Constitution* and her crew proved how unfounded Dacres' and the British Admiralty's conclusion had been. In late December the American ship defeated another thirty-eight gun frigate, the *Java*, leaving the English ship dismasted after a spirited two-hour duel.

In terms of the outcome of the War of 1812, the unexpected American victories during the first six months could not offset the crushing numerical superiority enjoyed by the Royal Navy. Napoleon's downfall in Europe freed the English fleet to enforce a tight blockade along the length of the American coastline. Confronted by British ships almost always in squadron strength, the American frigates spent most of the final two years of the war holed up in ports, hostages to the blockading English warships. In 1814, the same year that saw the burning of Washington, D.C., only two frigates succeeded in slipping through the English net; by the end of the war, only the *Constitution* remained at large.

Nonetheless, the *Constitution*'s victory over the *Guerrière* and the flurry of successes at sea that followed were like a tonic to the country, helping to sustain the United States through two more years of warfare. And "at home and abroad," as a nineteenth-century historian noted, "the valor of the American sailor was acknowledged to be a fixed fact."

**I**RONICALLY, although Hull's brilliant victory had established him as the foremost naval hero of the war, he soon relinquished command of the *Constitution* and did not go to sea again for a dozen years. Hull spent the remainder of the war years in charge of the naval yard at Portsmouth, supervising the building of a seventy-four gun warship. Later he served as commandant of the Charlestown Naval Yard in Boston. In this post, among his other duties, Hull attended to the repair of ships, including the *Constitution* when she came into his care for a much-needed overhaul in 1820.

Many years after the war, while on a pleasure tour of the Mediterranean, Hull encountered an acquaintance of old—James Dacres, now captain of the seventy-four gun *Edinburgh* and soon to be a rear admiral. The two former adversaries visited again at Rome in 1837. Hull and Dacres reportedly enjoyed taking walks together, and could oftentimes be seen strolling arm-in-arm through the Eternal City, the smoke and thunder of a distant afternoon all but forgotten. ★

*Freelance writer Jeff Seiken lives in Philadelphia and has a special interest in maritime history.*

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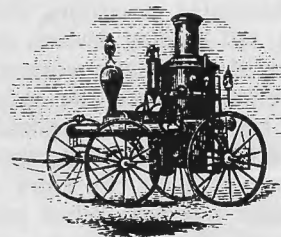
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11/87

## A Mechanic Gave the World a Lift *Continued from page 46*

about five times safer than climbing up or down stairs. In fact, equipped as they are with multiple hoisting cables, sophisticated governors, door interlocks, self-leveling devices, and computerized automatic controls, modern elevators are the safest mode of transportation available. Industry statistics report only about one serious accident for every 65 million miles traveled. When injuries do occur, they are much more likely to be the result of human error or inattention rather than mechanical failure.

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in the CN Tower in Toronto, Canada, at 1,815 feet the tallest self-supporting structure in the world.

Apparently buildings even higher than these giants could be constructed. An article entitled "Building to the Sky" in the May 8, 1985, edition of *USA Today* notes that "the consensus among engineers is that the technology already exists to build a half-mile-high building, [although] they acknowledge that the problems increase exponentially as you get above 100 stories. After all, they point out, a building of that magnitude is really a vertical city (pop. 80,000 to 100,000), with its own transportation system, power station, sewage treatment plant and ZIP code."

The transportation system in such buildings is not part of the problem. The enigma is that no one has been able to redesign the human ear to accommodate rapid, extreme pressure change. "While engineers have designed high-speed elevators which

can drop as much as 2,000 feet per minute, they haven't changed the human ear," says vertical transportation specialist William Lewis. "A direct descent of 150 or 200 stories could be very painful, especially for people with colds or sinus problems." Nevertheless, seemingly undeterred by such human limitations, architects have created practical designs for buildings as high as 210 stories, towering to heights of 2,500 feet.

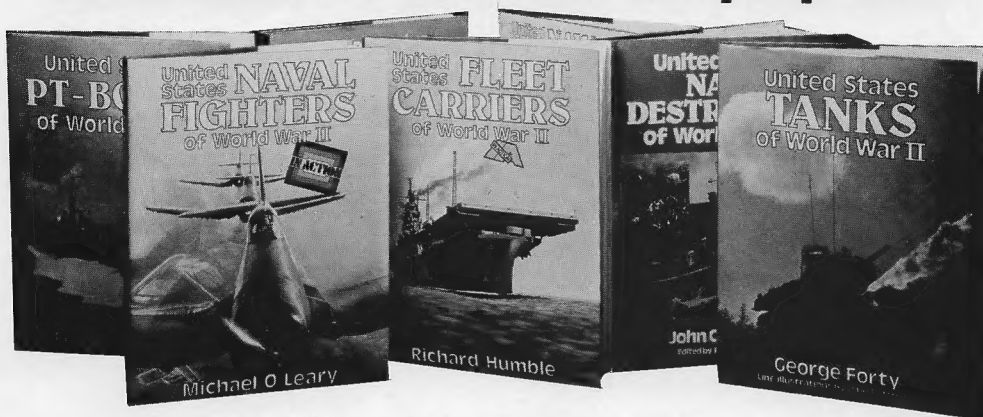
Regardless of what may be on the horizon, Elisha Otis would be astounded by the skylines of such cities as Chicago, New York, and San Francisco today. The sky truly is the limit, thanks to this mechanic who considered safety more important than profit. ★

*A great-great-great niece of Elisha Graves Otis, Texas freelancer Sharon Drain writes for regional and national publications.*



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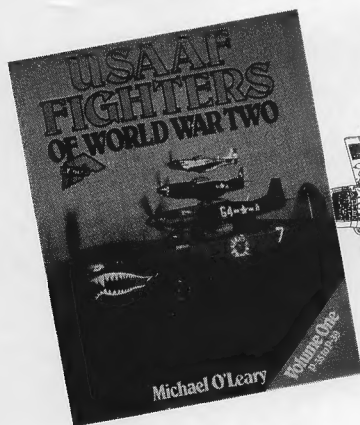


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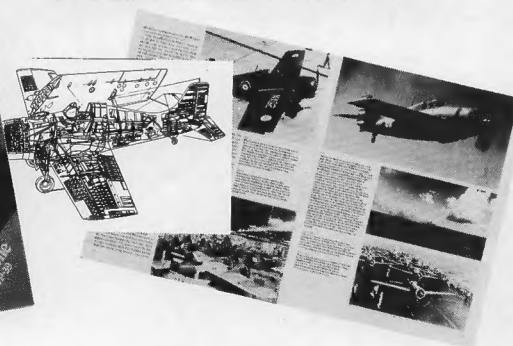
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